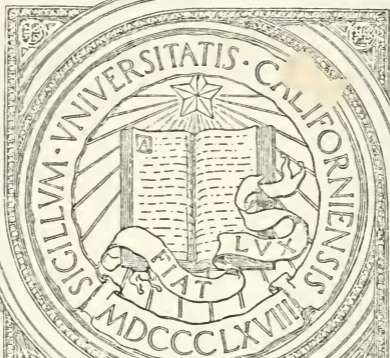




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THE
ABBÉ DANIEL

FROM THE FRENCH

OF

ANDRÉ THEURIET
"

BY

HELEN B. DOLE



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AMERICAN
ALPHABET

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INTRODUCTION.

"THE ABBÉ DANIEL" is one of those literary gems which the French excel in producing. Simple in plot, chaste in style, dainty in humor, its beauty consists chiefly in its artistic counterpoise of the characters: the abbé himself, with his affectionate, unselfish nature, unworldly, sweet-tempered, easily crushed; his namesake growing up from an impetuous youth into a gallant soldier, hearty, frank, likeable; the flowerlike Denise fading away and leaving a still brighter flower as a consolation for her husband and the abbé who had loved her; Beauvais, the rough, hearty proprietor, so genial under the outside bark, so wise and generous! These are the four chief actors, and how perfectly they balance and contrast with one another!

The story is a sort of pastoral, though free from all insipidity, seasoned as it is with wholesome French spice. It is sentimental,

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but free from mawkishness. It is pure as crystal, and yet it does not flaunt this purity with a hypocritical grimace.

It is often said that France has no word for *home* because the French do not know what *home* means. "The Abbé Daniel" shows how false such a charge is. It takes us into that beautiful home life which the French themselves perhaps avoid displaying to inquisitive eyes, but which is really the secret of the true stability of France. We here see a French home, and we finish the perusal of the book with a new respect for the French farmer and the French girl, the French soldier and the French priest.

N. H. D.



THE ABBÉ DANIEL.

CHAPTER I.

SEPTEMBER 10, 183-.

DAY before yesterday I was twenty years old, and I left the seminary, never to return. My heart is full of joy, and a sweet fever of excitement has taken

possession of me since my return to my own dear country home.

I have renewed the acquaintance of my little domain of Les Bruasseries. I have visited Les Templiers, where my uncle lives, and where I found Denise once more, taller and more beautiful than she was a year ago. She is now seventeen.

This morning I crossed the meadow separating Les Bruasseries from Les Templiers; I made my way up to the foot of the pointed turret which overlooks Étableaux. From there the whole valley can be seen. On the right, Étableaux rises in terraces on its rocky slope. Below, beyond the gentle outlines of the chestnut-trees, the Égronne makes its slow, winding way through the meadows, now hidden under the alders, now reappearing with dazzling

brilliancy. On the left, in the far distance, the town of Pressigny spreads out like a fan, and the river bathes the last of its houses. The sun was rising in a sky of spotless blue and filling the whole valley with light. What a feast for the eyes! What beautiful weather, and what a joy to be alive!

The other evening, when I went to say good-by to the Abbé Bonneau, our superior, I found him, as usual, shut up in the library.

“Well, my son,” he said, lifting his already snowy head, “you are going to leave us?”

I thanked him for his kindness to me, then explained to him that I did not feel a sufficiently decided calling for the ecclesiastical state, and that I should try to seek my salvation while remaining in the world.

“My son,” he replied, in his slow voice, “you are talking of what you know nothing about; the world submits hearts to cruel tests, and you are one of those to whom it loves, above all, to cause suffering. However,” he added, holding out his hand to me, “God knows how to reclaim his sheep. I will not say *adieu* to you, but *au revoir*; for if I read my heart aright, you will come back to us again.”

Poor abbé! Scarcely two days later the heavy door closed behind me, and to-day the seminary already seems like a strange, far-away country!

THE EVENING OF SEPTEMBER 18.

The clock at Pressigny has just struck ten; the night is calm, the house is at rest, and I alone cannot sleep. . . .

To-day was Sunday. We did not go to vespers, and I spent the afternoon at Les Tempeliers. The weather was bright and warm, the servants had gone out for the rest of the day; my uncle was hunting, and my aunt had fallen asleep while reading her prayer-book. The bells of Pressigny had been ringing a long time, and had just ceased. The hum of insects, accent-



uated by the sharp file of the locust, pervaded the fields. Denise and I were sitting at the foot of the tower, near some raspberry-bushes. We were silent. I felt happy and yet troubled; I should have been glad to walk about to relieve my embarrassment, and yet I remained still. She too seemed disturbed.

“Denise,” I said at last, “I want to ask something of you, which would make me very happy. . . . Pick that rose over there, and give it to me.”

She did not move; and I, blushing for shame, dared not look at her. Suddenly, without breaking the silence, she got up and went slowly toward the rose-bush. Her hand slipped through the branches; but while breaking off the flower, she uttered a cry. I ran to her; the thorns had wounded her arm.

"It is nothing," she said, and started to move away. I took her hand; I placed my trembling finger on the cut, from which a single drop of blood was oozing. She trembled, and our eyes met. She let the rose fall, and we fled from each other, frightened at our temerity.

I spent the rest of the day wandering through the woods. Every time I slackened my pace, I seemed to feel once more in my finger's ends the gentle impression of her delicate flesh, torn by the thorns.

At nightfall, as I was roaming about Les Templiers, my uncle saw me, and called to me. I went into the large hall with downcast eyes, and trembling from head to foot. Denise was bending over the fire, and I could not see her face. A tall, light-complexioned young man,

with broad shoulders and a bold, forward manner, was standing near the dining-table.

“You must take supper with us,” said my uncle, “and with this young fellow here. Do you remember him?”

I had hardly ventured to raise my eyes toward the new-comer, when, with a burst of laughter, he exclaimed:—

“What! little *Dani*, don’t you remember Simon Beauvais, of Pressigny, who fished you out one day, when you had fallen into the Égronne? So you have thrown off the cowl?” And his noisy laughter began again.

I did not know how to reply, and, confused at this unfortunate recollection brought up in the presence of Denise, I shook hands with the giant, who then seated himself at table, next my cousin. I kept silent throughout supper, while

Beauvais, made more jovial by my uncle's wine, was full of jests and merry tales. Denise seemed preoccupied, and her words were few. As I was taking leave our eyes met, but she quickly turned away her face, and I went back to Les Bruasseries, with my head full of plans, and my heart filled with vague forebodings.

SEPTEMBER 28.

Simon Beauvais remains at Les Templiers. The house resounds all day long with his coarse laughter. My uncle shows him partiality; the servants cannot say enough about his strength, his spirits, and his ability; even Denise is under the charm; while I, unaccustomed to any kind of bodily exercise, feel more awkward and timid than ever in his presence. He has come to spoil

the peaceful happiness that I was silently enjoying.

To-day the vintage began in the valley. A glorious sun bathed the vines, with their foliage already turning red. The vintagers, working along the slopes on the side of Les Murets, called joyfully to one another. Wagons loaded with grapes were rolling along the roads, and an intoxicating odor of sweet new wine was exhaled from the presses.

Denise, wearing a wide-brimmed straw hat, stepped quietly among the vines; I followed her, happy to move about with her in the same warm air, and to tread the sand which her feet had touched. She stopped for a moment under a walnut-tree; the warm weather had made her cheeks glow, and her violet-colored eyes sparkled



in the shadow made by the projecting rim of her straw hat. Suddenly, a few steps from us, appeared Beauvais, driving the cart. His face took on that expression of raillery which always disconcerts me. While the vintagers were emptying their baskets into the casks on the wagon, the horse, made restless by the flies, started to run. Beauvais rushed ahead, seized him by the bit with one arm, compelled the kicking beast to stand still, and then looked round with a haughty smile. I stole a glance at Denise; her eyes were fixed on Beauvais, and her face wore an expression of unconscious admiration. I felt humiliated; for the first time jealousy ate into my heart, and I left the vineyard abruptly.

AT THE SEMINARY, October 20.

No, I was not made for life in the world, and the Abbé Bonneau was right. The trial, O my God, was not long. I could not remain at Les Templiers; and to stay even at Les Bruasseries was unbearable. Denise is to marry Beauvais in three days. They were talking about the marriage when I returned to Les Bruasseries, and I was the only one who knew nothing about it. A gossiping servant-girl took it upon herself to open my eyes. I felt my heart sink within me; it seemed as if a thick fog suddenly obscured my bright valley of the Égronne. I spent a night in tears, and in the morning I fled away without even seeing Denise for the last time.

I reached the town on a hot evening. All the inhabitants were out of doors.

I passed through the streets bordered with brilliantly lighted shops and filled with a gay, lively, animated throng ; then I plunged into the dark, solitary quarter surrounding the cathedral. The old church spread its great shadow over the cloisters and the walls of the seminary. Carrying my light bag in one hand, I knocked at the great door so familiar to me, and asked for the superior. I was shown into the library. At the farther side, at the end of two sombre walls of books, I discovered him, reading by his little lamp. At the sound of my footsteps he raised his head, and reaching out his hand, said in his calm voice,—

“ Well, I was right in predicting that you would come back to us.”

Then I felt that all was at an end, and could only answer him with a sob.

FOURTEEN YEARS LATER, March, 184-

While arranging my books I came across the small prayer-book which I used at Les Templiers. How little it



takes to make my mind wander and incline to forbidden emotions! At the sight of the brown binding I was touched. My poor heart reopened like

a half-closed wound. Les Templiers! in spite of myself, my heart is always at Les Templiers. I have perused my books in vain. Saint Augustine now seems artful, and Bossuet merciless. May God come to my aid, for left to myself I fear I shall be overcome.

At the seminary I was sustained by the enthusiasm of faith, by the attractive example of the apostles' self-sacrificing labors, and by the discipline of the house. . . . With ecstasy I made the sacrifice of my will. I was named vicar of one of the churches in the town. The pulpit was open to me, and I saw an attentive congregation below me. I prepared and studied my sermons with care,—all my youth rose to my lips; but it pleased God to give me, together with ordinary genius, a soul less ambitious than sen-

sitive. My zeal flagged; moreover, the city with its passions and noisy distractions disturbed and shocked me. I believed that an unknown village, hidden in the woods, would be better suited to the needs of my heart. I secured a parish at D——, off in Touraine, twenty leagues from Les Templiers. I welcomed this promise of a peaceful life; I took delight in the idea of burying myself at thirty-three, hoping that in the village it would at least be granted that my soul should bring forth fruits profitable to the parish. I have been in D—— for a year. I have four hundred parishioners scattered about in their little homes. The church is almost alone, in the centre, with the town-hall and the priest's house. My dwelling is humble and old, but peaceful and in

accordance with my tastes. Behind it there is quite a large, shady yard. What more do I need? . . .

My friends no longer write to me. All that are left of my family live at Les Templiers, where I can never return. Now and then the mail brings me a commission or a circular bearing the superscription: "To the curate of D——." No more letters from friends; no more letters to Daniel! . . .

Outside my parish I am dead; my parishioners are plain people, almost all uneducated. I see little of them except on Sunday; during the week I live in isolation. Marie-Lène, who served my predecessor and serves me, never speaks two words in a day. She perpetually wears, as it were, a leaden bandage on her forehead, and is spending the rest of her days in tiring herself

out for the love of God. I have no dog; Marie-Lène has a horror of animals. Even my garden, which gave me so much pleasure last year, has grown gloomy like my life. My brother priests of the neighboring parishes are all advanced in years, and have sedentary habits; moreover, their white hair wins my respect without winning my heart.

And here I am, seized with homesickness for the city. The annoyances of the town have given place to other torments. I am tired of solitude. My parish is like a great orchard, where Nature alone reigns peaceful and fruitful. The city is more or less in sympathy with every vocation; my village knows but two things,—manual labor and marriage. I have no bachelors over thirty. Wherever you see a chim-

ney smoking among the walnut-trees, there you find a family, there you find children. The church, the town-hall, and the priest's house are the only solitary dwellings; but the church has God, and every Sunday a crowd of faithful worshippers; the town-hall has the school, swarming with children; my abode alone is forsaken. . . .

Ah! poor pastor so out of place! — When I walk on the heights and in the hidden roads I am a prey to the most contrary thoughts. If ambition comes to smile at me in my dreams, a voice from my book replies, “Humility!” To the recollections of a too worldly love, the same voice replies, “Chastity!” To the need of friendship, “Isolation and separation!” And yet the corn trembling in the breeze and scattering pollen, the birds flying to their nests

hidden among the branches, the women carrying luncheon to their husbands or their sons in the vineyards, the peasants singing in the distance at evening when all other sounds are hushed, — what do they all say to me? — “Marriage! family!” . . .

If only I had a child to bring up, to teach, to love, — a child sleeping under my roof, playing about my door, filling my house with its joyous life!

APRIL, 184-.

This morning, just as I was entering the house after mass, I was accosted by an aged woman, whom I did not recognize at first. It was La Bruère, an old servant living with Denise. I had not seen her since I was at the seminary. My heart beat fast, and I was conscious of growing red in the

face. Somewhat intimidated by my cassock, she approached me and bowed, not knowing whether to call me Daniel or Monsieur le curé.

“Surely, you never thought of seeing me, Monsieur le curé?” she said at last. “I came here on account of my sister, who is a member of your parish. I have just come from Les Templiers, where every one wished to be remembered to you. Our mistress bade me ‘go without fail to my cousin’s, and inquire for his health.’ Poor, dear lady! She has always been rather frail since her little Denise was born, three years ago come Palm Sunday. Oh, you are not forgotten at Les Templiers, and even Monsieur Beauvais said to me: ‘Here is a book for you to carry to our cousin.’ . . . And the little girl! Here is a bunch of violets that she picked herself.”

La Bruère was always very talkative. Her gossip gave me time to compose myself. I was able to question her further without seeming too much agitated, and to console my feeble heart so suddenly awakened from a sleep of fourteen years. . . .

They are happy at Les Templiers! I thought so. Why should they not be happy? Beauvais is all attention to my cousin. They have a little daughter, whom they adore, and she is the living picture of her mother, whose sweet name she bears. La Bruère did not forget the least detail, she told me everything, — the child's pretty ways, the mother's occupations, Beauvais's feats in hunting. I seemed to see him again, my fortunate rival, towering above me; and I saw Denise too, so pale, so sweet and lovely, and I went over all the days gone by. . . .

Here a tear rolled down on the white embroidery of my neck-band, and sparkled as it hung there. O memories, why have I called you forth? O my heart, you believed yourself indifferent to the world, and you are moved at the recollection of a woman! . . .

They have a little daughter, who looks like her mother. . . .

APRIL, 184—.

A frightful accident! Poor man, where are you now? . . . I constantly see your look, so passing strange. What did he wish to say to me? . . . May God have mercy upon you! Poor woman, about to become a mother! Poor little child!

It was three o'clock in the afternoon. I was in church, and they were singing the *Tenebræ*. To-day is Maundy-

Thursday. The door was open wide, and let in the gentle spring air. The weather was as mild as the sweet peace of a conscience freshly reconciled with its God. Flowers which pious young girls had heaped upon the tomb of our Saviour filled the air with their fragrance. I was sitting in my accustomed place among the children. The women were ranged in front of the choir. The children had each brought a mallet to indicate realistically the consternation of Jerusalem. This circumstance, together with the coming of spring, made them more restless than usual. Little Daniel especially was more uneasy than ever. He is a child of eight years. For a long time I have singled him out among his companions for his good behavior, wide-awake manner, and also because his name was

Daniel, like my own. He disputed with his nearest neighbor, and tried to make his way to my side. Children are so quick to guess when they are loved! According to the custom on Maundy-Thursday, the first candles of yellow wax had been extinguished, and I was carried in spirit to Jerusalem. Little Daniel had succeeded in slipping to my side; the mildness of the air, the perfume of the flowers, and the singing of psalms soon closed his eyes, and he laid his sleepy head upon my arm. Next to the last candle had been put out. The impatient mallets were beginning to be heard, when all of a sudden a disturbance spread through the church. I turned my head, and saw a woman running. All the others rose, crowded together, and then rushed out. Some one came to me.

“Monsieur le curé, the carpenter Peyré (little Daniel’s father), while working on the roof of the new house, has fallen into the street, and is dying.”

I went out in my surplice, and ran towards the new house. They all made room for me as I came near, and I saw



stretched out—in, oh, my God, what a condition!—a man, who opened his great eyes toward me, looked strangely into my face, moved his lips, and was dead!

His wife was there, by his side, motionless as a statue. The people shrieked; she alone was dumb. She

is soon to be a mother. They bore away the corpse, and took the widow home; but before leaving, she raised her eyes to the top of the house, where the bouquet, placed there by her husband, fluttered its gay ribbons.

Peyré has no relatives here; he did not belong to this part of the country. The widow has only a brother, who has children himself. All are pitifully poor. Peyré did not even own his dwelling. Fortunately, I still have the larger part of the rent from Les Bruaseries; but what can money do? Oh, what are my troubles beside this great sorrow? Wretch that I am to complain!

When I was taking leave of the widow my attention was drawn to the heart-rending cries of little Daniel, who had just been sleeping so happily on

my arm. I took him by the hand, and led him home with me. I put him to bed in my guest-room. He is sleeping there now. His tears have dried, and left his cheeks covered with stains.

O God! Does thy providence see fit to bring me consolation through this terrible misfortune? Is Daniel to be my Easter gift from thee? . . .

TEN DAYS LATER.

May the peace of the Lord rest upon her throughout all ages! . . .

Peyré's wife followed her husband after ten days. I buried her by his side with her unborn child. She took to her bed the day after the accident. She would neither eat nor speak. The doctor despaired of her from the first. She seemed quite indifferent to her son. However, at the very last, as she held

Daniel's hand, she looked at him with inexpressible tenderness, then placed his hand in mine, without saying a word. I accepted the legacy.

MAY, 1847.

I am now occupying a new room; I gave mine, which was more airy and pleasant, to Daniel. It seems as if I had changed my home, and as if I were in a different parish. Peace has come back to me since I took this child to live under my roof. I still think often of Les Templiers; but now without bitterness and without risk. If Denise has a little girl, I have a boy; our destinies are not so different. Blessed be the Lord, who has sent me this child!

My little Daniel is still rather shy; he is not yet tamed. He is like a

bird all plumed for flight, which knows very well that this is not his nest. He is like the flowers we gather while in bud, which do not revive for some time; but shy as he is, he fills my house with merriment.

And while I am thus satisfying the desires of my heart and relishing this unhopèd-for paternity, I am praised. I am extolled and blessed throughout my parish. “Ah, Monsieur le curé, how good you are to do this! The good Lord will repay you!” I humble myself before God every evening. They let me take this child; they have given him to me; he is mine, — a beautiful, living child! I can feed him, give him a home, keep him in my house, and they ask nothing in return for such a treasure, and I am not their debtor; on the contrary, they thank me and praise me!

Ah, no one knows the peace, the happiness, that this young guest brings me in his open, outstretched hands. . . .
I have a child !



CHAPTER II.

HERE the journal of the Abbé Daniel comes to an end.

The new duties that came with the orphan into the priest's house silenced his troubled thoughts and melancholy recollections. He was obliged to think how to clothe the child, how to get him accustomed to his new surround-

ings, — above all, how to civilize him. And the abbé, timid, awkward, and inexperienced as he was, found it no easy task to concern himself with the details of practical life; but he set about it with all his heart. All his whole store of affection, so long pent up in him, without any means of expression, he now lavished on the adopted boy. He planned his clothing and his food with the joyous ardor which a young mother feels for her first-born, whom love tells what experience can never teach. Every day he spent hours watching him play, and every night looking at him while he slept.

He often thought of Denise still; but the thought of her carried with it now neither regret nor disappointment. Henceforth Denise seemed to the abbé

only as the happy mother of a child in whom would reappear later on all those graces and that bloom of youth which he had formerly loved so well. He went in fancy to Les Templiers; he saw the child growing up; he heard her fresh laughter in the midst of the orchard; and in his imagination he associated her destiny with that of his own child.

Seven years passed quickly in the midst of these occupations and pleasant fancies, and then La Bruère came again to D——, and this time she brought sad news indeed. Denise had never wholly recovered from the illness following her confinement; on the contrary, she seemed to grow weaker every day. This visit left the abbé anxious and melancholy. After La Bruère had gone, he walked up and down in the

garden for a long time. His heart was full of sadness, both sweet and bitter. Daniel, now quite tall, joined him, and after he had taken a few turns with him in silence, he suddenly asked: —

“What is the matter, cousin?” (The abbé had taught him to address him in this familiar way.) The abbé lifted his arm, and, placing his hand on his head, replied, “I have you!” and he turned his thoughts in another direction, though he still felt that his heart was too full for utterance.

The boy was surely growing up; he was nearly sixteen, and would soon have to be separated from him. He had gradually completed the rather circumscribed course of studies familiar to the abbé. He had taken his first communion; he had learned French, ancient history, and that of his own

country. The abbé had noticed that he was apt to grow excited as he listened to tales of war, but that he seemed bored, and often suppressed a yawn over philosophical dissertations ; and he foresaw that a contemplative, studious life would not be suited to him, but that the demon of adventure would rouse him to action. When this desire for active life should awaken, what would become of the poor "cousin"? Daniel was as necessary to him as his daily bread. He noticed the growing beauty of his age, and he saw with terror that the gentle curves of childhood were disappearing in his face, and giving place to the angles of adolescence. He felt that in two years more, perhaps even sooner, it would be necessary for him to choose a career. Would he be farmer, merchant, clerk,

or what? And the abbé anxiously strove to discover the first signs of what Daniel's preference would be;



and yet there was nothing that he dreaded so much as the very thing that he was on the lookout for. Besides these anxieties, he was every day

made miserable by the lad's daring and adventurous spirit. Daniel played with danger as with a flower; nothing surprised him, and nothing would stop him. Quick, strong, and always good-natured, he was the life and light of the village; he was seen at all the fêtes and all the assemblies; he possessed something of the nimbleness, the grace, and also the wildness of the squirrel. Once he had been brought home to the priest's house all bruised by falling from a horse, — a young horse, that he had mounted bareback, and ridden on the gallop through the fields. Another time he narrowly escaped drowning in the mill-pond, into which he had plunged to rescue a small child.

The unhappy, timid "cousin" sighed, and every day as he watched him go out he felt all the anxiety of a mother

for an only son. Every time Daniel left the house the abbé felt inclined to give him absolution *in articulo mortis*; but how delightful were the hours which followed, when his fears had been put to flight! Then his heart felt refreshed as by a gentle spring rain!

One evening they were walking together along the high road. The last sunset tints were fading, the valley was beginning to grow dark; but along the horizon some clearly marked lines were still visible against the orange-colored sky. A dark form, vigorously outlined, appeared on the road toward the West, and a sound of footsteps was heard. The young man looked at this sudden apparition for a moment, then exclaimed: —

“Cousin, a soldier!”

To be sure, it was a foot-soldier; with

knapsack on his back, his arms lightly swinging to a rhythmic step, he was coming toward the pedestrians. He soon met them and quickly passed by. Some mysterious force seemed to impel him onward. Everything about his person was expressive, and appeared to say: "Faster! I am going to surprise some one yonder; yonder a joy awaits me!"

The abbé continued to walk on, but Daniel stopped and was following the soldier with eager eyes. When he was lost in the darkness, he exclaimed all of a sudden: —

"Oh, cousin, do you know? I should like to be a soldier!"

The abbé made no reply.

"Cousin," continued the boy, "have I pained you?"

The abbé, still silent, went on his way with rapid steps, thinking of the inex-

pressible anguish of the coming separation, and mentally repeating these words from the Gospel of Saint Matthew: "*Pater mi, . . . non sicut ego volo, sed sicut tu.*". . . "Not my will, but thine."

The next day at noon, the postman brought a letter from Simon Beauvais. Denise was seriously ill, and begged to be remembered in her cousin's prayers. At first the abbé seemed crushed by the blow, then he went straight to the church and remained on his knees there for an hour; he came out somewhat strengthened, but not composed, and wandered through the fields till night. He refused to take any supper when he returned, went into the garden, and spent most of the night walking in order to soothe his mental agitation by bodily fatigue.

About two o'clock in the morning the coolness of the atmosphere overcame him, and he was able to take some rest. He was awakened at four by a strange rumbling, which proceeded from a neighboring barn. It was the noise of a threshing-machine, brought to the village the day before, the mechanism of which, new in that part of the country, had excited Daniel's admiration. This dull rumbling was an added irritation to the abbé's very sensitive nervous system. He went back into the garden and began to think of Denise again. The postman went by every day at noon; he would without doubt bring another letter, and the abbé decided to act according to the news it would contain, and if necessary, to set out for Les Templiers. He walked to and fro in the garden to

weary himself and to pass away the time. The rumbling of the threshing-machine pursued him. He went back to his room and packed his valise with feverish activity in order to be ready when noon should come.

Daniel, however, did not know what to think. Ever since the day before his cousin had been unapproachable. Several times already he had tried to ask him questions, and been repulsed with impatient gestures. Once again he ventured to ask, —

“For heaven’s sake, cousin, what is the matter with you?”

“Leave me alone,” replied the abbé, shortly.

Daniel was abashed, and went to the village, where he always found some new amusement; and as the threshing-machine fascinated him, he entered the

barn, and was soon busy feeding it with wheat.

He had scarcely left the priest's house when his cousin began to look for him everywhere.

"Where is Daniel?" he asked Marie-Lène.

Marie-Lène shrugged her shoulders. "Who knows?"

"Where is Daniel?" he asked again, of a child playing near.

"Gone to see the threshing-machine; he is pushing in the straw."

"The rascal!" exclaimed the abbé, and he ran excitedly toward the barn.

The neighbors imagined that some misfortune had happened to Daniel; and before the abbé reached the barn, they had rushed on ahead, and all sorts of rumors were circulating through the village. Everybody hurried to the

threshing-machine and began to lament. Meanwhile the abbé arrived, and seeing the frightened looks of the crowd, felt sure that some accident had happened to his charge. Beside himself, he rushed into the barn, ran to the machine, and was stupefied to find Daniel, unmindful of the commotion, feeding the threshing-machine, and pushing in the grain with his usual liveliness.

It was but the work of a moment for the abbé to run to him, seize him round the waist, and throw him aside. Every one was amazed at his violence.

Then, like one brought back to life from the dead, he began to look anxiously about him. The threshing-machine went on rumbling. Impelled by some strange agitation, some necessity of explaining his ridiculous im-

petuosity, the abbé suddenly seized a sheaf of grain, and with a trembling hand pushed it into the mouth of the machine.

“Look, look!” he exclaimed; “this is what Daniel was doing! Tell me if he was not in danger of having his hand cut off!”

And in his impatience to push in the feed he thrust in his own hand, felt it caught by the machinery, uttered a cry, and drew out his arm all bleeding and mangled.

The abbé was carried home; a trail of blood marked his path. One of the villagers mounted his horse and ran to the city for a physician, while a midwife made the first dressing. The abbé remained unconscious for a long time, and then gradually came to himself. The first thing that he noticed was

Daniel's troubled face, and he tried to smile at him; but weakened by the loss of blood, he was obliged to close his eyes, and again became unconscious. The doctor arrived at last, and announced that it would be necessary to amputate the mutilated arm immediately.

When the operation was over, the abbé asked what time it was. It was two o'clock. Daniel showed him a letter from Beauvais. The poor abbé soon read it; it contained only this one line: "Denise is dead." The abbé said that he wanted to sleep, sent every one out of the room, and remained alone on his bed, still soaked though it was in blood.

When evening came, Daniel came back into the room, lighted a night-lamp, and sat down by the patient's

bedside. The abbé was asleep. From time to time the young man wet his forehead with a compress of cool water. About eleven o'clock he seemed delirious and began to talk aloud. The names of Denise and Daniel often escaped his pale lips. Suddenly he woke up and saw his charge in tears.

"Why are you weeping?"

"Cousin, will you take this medicine?"

"No, thank you; I am calm, perfectly calm. . . . He pondered for a time; then, as though he had taken a decided resolution, he said to Daniel:

"Go, bring some paper, and write for me."

He dictated a letter informing Beauvais of his accident. He added that, as henceforth it would be unbecoming for him to say mass, he purposed, as soon as he recovered, to go to Les

Templiers, and if Beauvais would allow him, to devote himself to the education of the dear little orphan girl.

When the letter was addressed and sealed the abbé said: —

“You must carry this yourself to town to-morrow morning. . . . And now, Daniel, what do you think of this?”

“I think, my dear cousin, that it would have been better if my arm had been left in the threshing-machine instead of your hand.”

“Let us not speak of the accident. What do you think of this letter?”

Daniel bent his head, then replied in a half-choked voice: —

“I believe that you will have to leave me here.”

“And what would you do if that should be the case?”

“I should kill myself, cousin.”

The abbé looked at him seriously, and said:—

“In a month I shall be well; we have no time to lose. When you have dropped this letter in the box to-morrow, go to the gendarmery and inquire what formalities are required for entering the army. In a month you will enlist . . . in the infantry, not the cavalry! . . . Now go to bed and— Wait, listen to one thing more: Deny the sun at high noon, if you will, but never doubt me. . . . Go to bed!”

As Daniel was leaving the room the good abbé fell back on his pillow, murmuring to himself:—

“Epaulets and a uniform! That will be fine! fine!”

A month later, the abbé had nearly recovered. The day fixed for his de-

parture had come. He spoke his farewell from the pulpit to his parishioners, who were in tears; then his luggage was placed on a wagon drawn by a mule, he said good-by to the impassive Marie-Lène, and they took the road for Tours.

It was a silent journey. Daniel looked mournfully after the last groups of trees in the village as they disappeared from sight; the abbé considered what good advice to give his ward, — that courage is nothing without reflection, that discipline is a support rather than a humiliation, that the best gifts of the mind are worthless unless cultivated by a strong will, and finally, counsels appropriate to Daniel's character.

The next day, at Tours, the young man enlisted in the forty-ninth regiment, stationed at Bordeaux. The recruiting

officer asked if the engagement would be for two years.

“For seven,” answered the abbé, abruptly.

Toward evening they took the train together, as the railway for Bordeaux went in the direction of Les Templiers. The abbé was to get out at the fourth station. They sat facing each other without saying a word, and even avoided looking at each other. At the third station the abbé tried to speak, but he felt that tears would stifle his voice, and he kept silent. “Port-de-Piles!” called the conductor, and the train stopped. The abbé and Daniel kissed each other many times, and then the elder got out alone. Daniel handed his valise to him, their hands were clasped once more, and the train moved on.

It was just at twilight. The abbé watched the train speeding away under its long plume of smoke, till it was out of sight. He thought he could distinguish a white handkerchief fluttering at one of the doors, and he waved his left arm. . . . Then the train was lost to view on the darkening horizon; and the abbé, leaving the station, hastened along a cross-road, which disappeared between two thick hedges.



CHAPTER III.

THE abbé had still five leagues to go on foot before he would reach Les Templiers; but the night was fine, and the way was familiar to him. One never forgets the old home roads. Besides, he loved the walk. Just at this particular time, when his heart was so full, he would not have shortened the distance if he could. He was glad to be alone. After young bees have

emigrated in long swarms, there is a sudden silence around the hive. A similar silence now enveloped the abbé. No longer had he anywhere a home. It mattered little to him. He did not wish to be happy. He felt at this moment strong enough to endure his sadness for seven years. And then was he not going to care for his *other* child, the daughter of Denise? How well he would love her, both for Daniel's sake, and for her mother's.

“She will take the place of Daniel in my life,” he thought. “I shall have brought up these two children. And who can say then that my life has been useless? I will make of Denise a charming young girl, good and wise, like her mother. I shall hold in my hands the destinies of two young souls, —and who knows? Perhaps, some

day, I may join together these two destinies, so that they will be but one. Oh! if that day comes, then I shall be ready to die! But Beauvais, whom I always forget,—the rich, ironical Beauvais! — Beauvais, who once had only to show his face, to drive me off to the seminary. . . . Fortunately, I have seven years before me. And to think that I am going to see her now,—the daughter of Denise! . . . ”

The abbé went on talking to himself in this melancholy strain, as he hastened along. In the moonlight his thin shadow was cast before him on the white road, and seemed to be running ahead. It was midnight when he reached the borough of Pressigny. Les Templiers was only a short half-hour's walk from there, and he did not wish to stop in the borough. How-

ever, he had not informed Beauvais that he should come that night, and he shuddered at the very thought of the first interview; but a mysterious force impelled him on toward the farm.

When he reached the top of the hill of Les Murets, he saw the steep roof of the tower softly lighted by the moon. Then he thought no more of Daniel; he did not even think of the reception he should meet with.

There it was before him,—the tower of his dreams! He entered the courtyard, went up to the main door, on which is still carved the cross of the Knights Templars. All was silent. He went straight to the window on the ground-floor, where his uncle formerly slept, and rapped on the shutters. A man's voice called out, sleepily:—

“Who is there ? ” and almost immediately the shutters were thrown open.

“It is I,” murmured the abbé, in a timid voice.

“Who, you ? ”

“Yes, Daniel.”

“I will open the door for you.”

A large, bearded face appeared for an instant in the moonlight. A thread of light soon came through the shutters, which Beauvais had mechanically closed ; then heavy steps resounded in the hall.

“After all,” thought the abbé, “my Bruasseries are near at hand.”

For a moment he even had an idea of taking refuge there. The ray of light vanished, the steps died away. He went trembling toward the door, which finally opened. Beauvais stood aside to let his guest enter.

“So you have come!” he said, simply.

“I am rather late,” the abbé murmured, faintly.

Without replying, Beauvais carefully barred the door, and showed him into the hall. There they could examine each other. They were equally surprised; both were speechless. Beauvais was nearly twice the height of his cousin, and as large in proportion. The night-dress he wore disclosed bare legs of herculean proportions. His bushy hair and thick, ill-kempt beard formed a disorderly setting to his high-colored face. In spite of his agitation, the abbé compared him mentally to Nimrod, the wild hunter of Scripture. Beauvais, on the other hand, seemed to be looking around the room for his cousin, whom he had just let in,

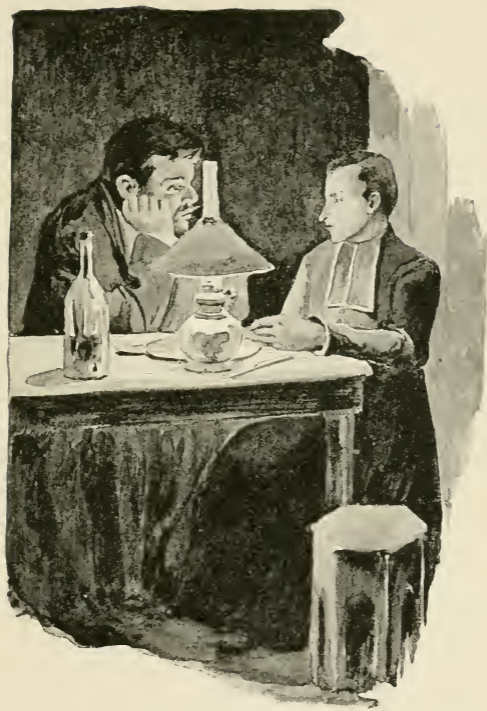
the cousin rendered thinner and more insignificant than ever by his embarrassment and his scanty cassock, while the shadow of his three-cornered hat made his face seem smaller and more pale.

“He is a mere child,” said Beauvais to himself.

“I will go to Les Bruasseries,” thought the abbé.

This examination lasted but a second. Beauvais set the lamp on the table and said in a low voice : —

“So here you are !” Then he pressed the abbé’s slender hand in his great palms. “You are at home here. Thank you for coming, but do not make a noise. The little girl is asleep close by; I want to give her a surprise to-morrow when she wakes. . . . You have hardly changed at all, my cousin !”



The abbé, both surprised and touched, replied: —

“Nor have you, cousin.”

“Don’t make any noise,” repeated Beauvais in an undertone. He made his cousin sit down as though he were a child, and seated himself in front of him. When they had talked for some minutes, all the while examining each other, Beauvais rose, and walking on tip-toe, went into the kitchen to get some cold meat, while the abbé, left in the dark, said to himself: —

“How different he is from what I thought just now!”

Beauvais came back with a table-cloth, and was preparing to spread it on the table.

“No, no,” said his cousin.

“No! why not?” replied Beauvais.

“The table-cloth, you see, was meant

for the curé, but for the cousin it shall be the oil-cloth, such as I have for myself."

He placed a game pie on the table, then brought out a bottle of wine.

"The bottle," he continued, "was there in a corner waiting for you; the wine will refresh you after your fatigue; it is Bordeaux."

"Bordeaux!" exclaimed the cousin, thinking of Daniel.

"Hush! remember the little one! . . . How happy she will be to-morrow!"

Beauvais took two glasses, filled them half-full, and wished to drink a health. The abbé looked at him kindly. The rough huntsman had tears in his eyes. As he drank, all his grief suddenly came back to him.

"Never will I go to Les Bruasseries!" said the abbé, rashly, and then tried to

eat. Both were silent now; the soul of the deceased had descended between them, and both struggled not to speak of her whom they wanted so much to talk about.

Their silence, broken only by occasional commonplace remarks, became painful. After ten minutes the abbé pleaded weariness as an excuse for retiring.

“I will accompany you to your room,” said Beauvais, and together they climbed the spiral staircase leading to the tower. “Your room will be rather far from the ground, but then you asked to live in the tower.”

The room was all ready. Beauvais lighted a little lamp and pressed his cousin's hand once more. “Good night,” he said; “to-morrow you will see Denise!”

He went away, and the abbé, after saying a short prayer, blew out his lamp and went to bed.

The room was full of sunlight when the sound of swallows awoke him about eight o'clock the next morning. He rubbed his eyes, and for a moment did not know where he was. He ran to the window and opened it. To the right the ruins of the old castle rose perpendicularly on the hill of Étableaux; below, the Égronne wound through the meadows, between two rows of alders; and on the left, in the distance, the chimneys on the blue roofs of Pressigny were smoking; the dam at Étableaux roared, and the swallows uttered a sharp cry as their wings grazed the window-sill; then they mounted into the air and were lost in the blue ether.

The abbé took in all the sights and sounds, inhaled the morning breeze, and thought that he was dreaming. . . .

Suddenly a silvery voice reached his ear, the vibrating tones of his dearly loved Denise. "Petit-Pinson," sang the little voice, "when I tell you there are nests in the service-trees, it is because I know there are ! . . ."

No, no, Denise was not dead, for she had just spoken. He leaned out of the window to try to catch sight of her, but his eyes met only the green tops of the trees. He listened for a long time, but the voice was silent. Had he really heard it? Was it not a dream? He was moving away, when he noticed a pot of verbenas in bloom on the window-sill.

Who had placed it there?

He hastened to dress, in order to see

the little girl, and while he was dressing it occurred to him that Daniel had now reached Bordeaux. Just as he was going out, Beauvais, who had been watching for him, came to him in haste and pushed him back into the tower, saying: "Go back; I am going to find my little daughter!"

The abbé went back into his room, and soon heard the sound of Beauvais's heavy shoes on the stairs; then he noticed a prattling and rustling. He listened.

"A beautiful swallow is up there with her little ones; you will see," said Beauvais's deep voice; and a pretty voice, the voice he had just heard, replied:—

"Walk very softly so as not to frighten them."

The abbé felt his knees tremble, and sat down.

“Papa, go in first, but very softly, very softly,” said the silvery voice again.

The door opened a little, then wider, and Beauvais pushed the little girl into the abbé’s arms.

Denise stopped in amazement, the cousin did not move from his chair. Beauvais looked at them. Finally the cousin passed his hand across his forehead, then he smiled in a bewildered way. The Denise of long ago was before his eyes.

She was dainty, rather slight, with chestnut hair, a rosy complexion, slightly sun-burned, with large, solemn, blue eyes, the pupils of which were both brilliant and velvety. Her broad, prominent forehead, the honest, resolute, frank eyes, her little rosy nose with mobile nostrils, gave to her face

a wonderful expression of vivacity, energy, and resolution, softened by a pleasant, childlike smile. She was not exactly pretty, but she was fascinating.

The abbé held out his hand to her, but she did not dare to go to him.

“Are you afraid of me, my child?”

“Yes, sir.”

Daniel rose, bent down, and kissed her forehead; then he said to Beauvais: —

“She is our child, is n’t she?”

Beauvais was radiant with joy and paternal pride. When they had become somewhat acquainted, all three went down into the garden, where they found La Bruère the very first thing. They had to stop and listen to her exclamations: —

“Oh, Monsieur le curé, the dear man of God, here you are as though you had just come back from the war, with

one arm less! Ah, what a misfortune, good friends! And on just the very day when our mistress was buried. Oh, my good friends, who would have thought it?"

After listening to La Bruère's words of sympathy, he had to visit every nook and corner of Les Templiers. Denise had skipped away. They went from barn to barn, from granary to granary, while Beauvais made explanations and the abbé recalled old memories. After a complete survey, Beauvais exclaimed: —

"My cousin, here is the best thing of all; I have kept this for the last."

He took him into a new stable, and with his head thrown back and folded arms he fixed his eyes on his cousin as though he expected him to utter some exclamation. The abbé looked

with all his eyes. The stable contained one horse and one cow. Was it the horse or the cow which he ought to admire? Great was the abbé's embarrassment. After some moments of silence, Beauvais said, with an air of disappointment: —

“Come, it is too bad! You don't understand anything about it. Let us take it that you have n't seen anything.”

Just at this moment the abbé saw once more in his former rival's face a gleam of the old irony.

“This horse,” continued Beauvais, “has not its equal for twenty leagues around. Now let us go to Les Bruasseries.”

They did not return to Les Templiers till nearly noon, in time for dinner. The cousin was naturally seated between the father and daughter; but long before

dessert Denise had disappeared, and the abbé heard her in the garden carrying on a lively dispute with Petit-Pinson.

Petit-Pinson was a boy of fifteen, more than a head taller than Denise; but in spite of his size, obstinately called Petit-Pinson by the child. Petit-Pinson was La Bruère's factotum and Beauvais's shepherd-boy. Among his flock there was an ass which was, it seemed, Denise's particular



property, and was called Benoît. At this time the shepherd-boy wanted to take his cattle to Les Épinaies, and the choice of pasturage did not please Denise.

“I tell you,” she cried, in her pretty, decided voice, — “I tell you, Petit-Pinson, that Benoît shall not go to Les Épinaies!”

Petit-Pinson held Benoît by the ear, Denise was pulling him by the halter.

“Who will win the victory?” thought the abbé, who was watching the scene.

It was Denise. She led Benoît quietly to the stable, then came back and took her seat at the table.

“She has a will of her own!” said the abbé, in amazement.

Dinner over, Beauvais declared that business called him to the fair at Lésigny.

“I would take you along,” he added, addressing Daniel; “but what would you do in the midst of a mule-market?”

He started off, and the abbé went to

walk with Denise. At night they took supper alone together, for Beauvais did not return till late. Thus passed the first day.

Days, weeks, months succeeded each other. When he left Daniel the abbé believed that he was condemned to seven years of sorrow; he was quite surprised to find himself sweetly happy. He was like a man sitting by a window, before which the picture of happiness passes slowly back and forth. He was happy and felt calmed. Life on the farm suited his nature, prone to timidity and listless dreaming. Everything which interested the household delighted him. The neglected garden, full of grass, with its paths overgrown with fennel and anise, with its arbor broken down with the weight of honeysuckle and clematis; the hen-house,

once the chapel of Les Templiers, where the hens laid their eggs in the niches of mutilated saints; the fig-tree shading the corner of the green court-yard with its thick branches; the pigeons, with melodious wings, which came to quench their thirst in the water running in the gutters; the great heaps of straw in the sunshine; the cows exhaling an odor of milk as they went along solemnly to pasture; the gunshots resounding in the woods of Les Courtils and the baying of the hounds; the bleating of the sheep mingled with the melancholy calls of the shepherd-boys at evening; and in the morning the clear tones of the bells of Pressigny, chiming together, — the abbé delighted in all this. Like a bee gathering honey from every flower, he found his pleasures in the smallest details of rustic life.

Winter came, less rich in gifts than autumn, but abounding in quiet social pleasures. There were more frequent



reunions and assemblies, especially in the evening, in the great hall, now changed to a kitchen. The granite fireplace offered hospitality to every-

body. The latest news from Pressigny and the neighboring villages was told here; long stories also of the time of the Knights Templars, or else the legend of the washerwoman, whose bats could be heard at midnight near the fountain of Font-Gaudron.

Petit-Pinson, with wide-open eyes, looked frightened to death as he listened to everything, and curled himself up in his corner. La Bruère spun, Beauvais cleaned his gun, the abbé and Denise sometimes looked at a picture-book; and when Denise had explained the picture to her cousin, the cousin would explain the text to Denise.

Beauvais too was happy. The coming of the abbé allowed him to keep his daughter at Les Templiers. During his frequent absences he was

content to know that his people were united there and awaiting his return.

This thought kept him warm in Winter and cool in Summer, and he came back to his home as gladly as he left it. He was master of the house, and sometimes chose to make the kitchen resound with the roar of his commanding voice. But this tremendous voice was rarely terrible. Moreover, Denise knew how to change his anger to caresses, when necessary, and her cousin was her ally.

At first the abbé had tried to win Beauvais's good-will by compelling himself to admire his host's horses and dogs; but in this little game the countryman quickly detected his constraint, and a sort of condescension which still further showed his cousin's incompetency. He did not make sport

of him, but it was plain to see from his bantering manner that he did not consider him a practical person, or one to get anything out of. Beauvais was something of a jockey, and the qualities inherent to this profession were most repugnant to the abbé. These two men held each other in esteem, they loved each other at heart, but did not always understand each other. A bargain of a hundred francs or of a thousand francs was all the same to the abbé; to Beauvais nothing was so serious as business. One kept his eyes on the stars, the other on the earth, and the star-gazer was often tripped up by contact with terrestrial realities, like the astrologer in the fable. Beauvais took it upon him to overwhelm his cousin with his heavy artillery of ironical jests; but when Denise

showed her father her copy-books in the evening and explained her progress to him, Beauvais felt proud, and then he would suddenly break out into exclamations of gratitude to the abbé, which would mend everything and fill La Bruère with admiration.

La Bruère was the oldest person in the house. She was twenty years older than her master, who found her well established at Les Templiers when he came there to be married. She was an old maid, thin, alert, and a gossip, not cross, but domineering, giving Petit-Pinson three apples for a box on the ear, bustling about all day, and relating her dreams.

She showed great deference toward the abbé, for he had but one arm; he was a priest, and she had known him as a child. It pleased her, besides, in

her old age, to have a *cure* permanently at the farm. She called him *our* cousin, and regarded him as a good man, something of a dreamer, and harmless. Her sympathies, however, were more with Beauvais. The strong woman admired the strength of the man, and she took his part. However, she often snubbed him, for La Bruère was an independent ally.

Petit-Pinson was a submissive ally, or rather he was La Bruère's private possession. He was awkward, lazy, and a good deal of a glutton, but he had great respect for the old servant, and feared but two things, — La Bruère and the were-wolf.

And Denise? Denise was like a wild flower, and had the freshness, the capricious grace, and the vigor of all wild things. She loved her cousin

from the very first, because he had prevented her from being sent to boarding-school. The city was to her a terrible place; her father had taken her there twice to the fair, and the swarming, screaming, hustling crowd of people had given her a horror of civilization. She did not even like Pressigny, where people stared at her so; and when strangers came to Les Templiers she fled to the orchard.

The solitude of the fields, the various sounds on the farm, the deep shade of the woods, — these were the society she loved. She was not gay, nor yet melancholy; she had moods of agitation and of inactivity, of excitement and indifference, which came and went no one could tell why. She had not cared for dolls since her first communion, and did not yet care for books; needles

broke like glass between her fingers, and sedentary tasks could not keep her long. In spite of this mobile nature and capricious disposition, she had a will of iron and an energy which Petit-Pinson was not always the only one to perceive. She was affected as little by Beauvais's and La Bruère's fits of anger as a swallow by a rain storm. This mixture of shyness and restless mobility at first dismayed her cousin, and he asked himself, in alarm, how he should succeed in directing aright a soul of such extremes, an intelligence of such marvellous contradictions.

In place of energy the abbé possessed an inexhaustible affection, such as finally triumphs over the most stubborn obstinacy. Then, in the most hidden recess of his heart, was he not cherishing a plan which he had only to

think of to acquire new strength and courage? . . .

From the very day of his arrival at Les Templiers, the abbé wished to have his position there regulated. His whole income was six hundred francs, — the rent of Les Bruasseries. In spite of Beauvais's protestations, he had stipulated that he should pay him three hundred francs a year. With the surplus, he was able to send ten francs a month to Daniel, to clothe himself, and make presents to Denise, La Bruère, and even Petit-Pinson. Once free from these material details, he arranged his days. The whole week, with the exception of Sunday, was devoted to Denise.

During the week the abbé dressed like a country layman; but on Sunday it was quite another thing. On that

day a veritable priest came down out of the tower: shovel-hat, band, black stockings, shoes with silver buckles, cassock of fine cloth, — nothing was wanting. At nine o'clock he started for the church at Pressigny, in company with La Bruère, Petit-Pinson, and Denise. During mass he took his place with the surpliced choir, and from his stall, through the smoke of the incense, often watched Denise praying, with her head bent over her little prayer-book, in the shadow of a pillar.

Denise! — she was his joy and his blessing; she was his work, also. He watched the blossoming of her intelligence with the tender solicitude which a horticulturist gives a favorite rose just opening from a bud. Denise was now a young girl; the petulance of

childhood was already disappearing, to give place to bashful awkwardness and nervous excitement. In a short time she would be a young woman, and all her fine, energetic, feminine nature would attain its full development.

“Make haste,” said the abbé to himself; “make haste to sow the seed, that it may bring forth good fruit in season.”

And he poured out over her all his treasures of knowledge, wisdom, and observation. He wished to inspire in her especially, not a love for books, but a taste for serious occupations, and to cultivate her love for rural nature. Whenever the weather was suitable they took long walks together. Sometimes they would go on ahead, and Beauvais would follow to bring them back in the carriage; sometimes

they would wander through the fields, or follow the course of the Égronne. They always brought back a quantity of flowers; and when the peasants saw them pass, the gray-haired priest with one hand, and the girl wearing a red cap on her head, both with their hands full of flowers, they always gave them a hearty greeting, a pleasant word, and a cheerful smile.

So Denise was growing up in the bosom of this rustic, fruitful nature, with her father and the abbé, in an atmosphere impregnated with love.

One June evening, there was a wonderful occurrence in the large hall at Les Templiers. Beauvais would not return till very late. Denise and her cousin were alone, or very nearly so, for La Bruère was scalding the linen, and Petit-Pinson was asleep in his chair.

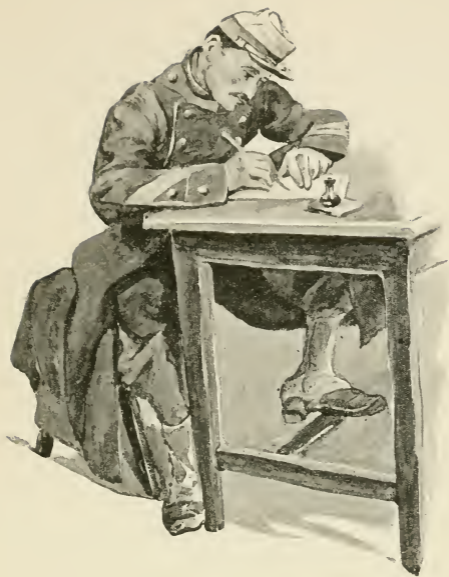


A bouquet gathered in the morning was on the table, and the lamp, covered with a shade, gave a soft light. When the evening reading was over, the abbé pushed the vase near Denise and the lamp, and turned it slowly, that his pupil might admire the bouquet on all sides.

In the centre there was a splendid white water-lily, half-closed, and full of mystery ; around it slender grasses trembled, forming a changing lace-work, in which all sorts of field, water, and wood plants were carelessly mingled, and opened their blossoms in the lamp-light. There were bells and cups, thyrses and variegated flowers, places full of light and shadowy depths. A dear little pale-green spider was suspended from a white lily-of-the-valley, and a golden-eyed fly, with yellow,

gauzy wings, fluttered about, half imprisoned in the network of intertwining grasses. As the abbé turned the vase, a fine, silvery powder fell from all the stamens, and hovered like smoke above the bouquet, giving forth an exquisite, penetrating perfume.

Denise suddenly uttered a cry of admiration, and buried her face in her hands. When she raised her head, her eyes were full of tears, but tears of joy; her eyes were so brilliant that the abbé was amazed; her animated features and rosy cheeks gave her face a new expression, and she was transformed. Her cousin, dazzled by her sudden beauty, was thrilled as he looked at her. The child of yesterday had become a young woman.



CHAPTER IV.

WHEN the Crimean War broke out, Denise was just sixteen. Daniel, who had been appointed corporal the first year of his engagement, wrote the abbé that he was going to the East. The

abbé hastened at once to Pressigny, and sent an extra money-order by mail to his ward. From this day forth, Daniel began to be the subject of conversation at the farm. Too poor to take a daily newspaper himself, the abbé persuaded Beauvais to subscribe for one. . . .

“Is your protégé in the cavalry?”

He also brought home a map of the war, “to give pleasure to his curate, who was following it with interest.” The abbé took possession of it, carried it to his room, and every day traced on the Eastern territory the march of the army to which the Forty-ninth belonged.

The East lay far beyond the ruins of Étableaux. Sometimes, at evening, after the sun had set in the opposite quarter of the heavens, the abbé, as he stood in front of the window in the

tower, would gaze anxiously into the deeper blue of the eastern sky, and when he closed the window would say: "May God protect him!"

About the middle of the year 1855 Daniel was made sergeant, and on this occasion the abbé received a letter, which he read to Beauvais at dessert, while Denise had gone to spread the linen in the orchard. This letter was full of the war. In it he described his military life, and gave an account of a day in battle, when at daybreak they were awakened by the beating of the drum and the heavy roaring of the cannon.

"Each one takes his gun and his knapsack," he said, "and is on the march! We advance in the dawn; we hear the short, decided commands, which are repeated and run along the

ranks; the aides-de-camp fly from one regiment to another; the troops take directions; our leaders address us with a few energetic words. Soon the noise of the cannon grows louder, and then the bugles sound, the band plays old national airs, no longer heard except in time of battle, and which make the blood of even the most timid boil, and then, at the rolling of drums, in the midst of the smoke, intoxicated with the smell of gunpowder, the whole regiment is thrilled all together with excitement.—Forward, march! . . . We are no longer Pierre, Jacques, and Daniel,—we are La France, each one but an atom in the great whole. We watch the arm of our captain, whom we no longer hear; we say good-morning with our eyes to our comrades; and we are off. This often lasts all day. Men fall,

but still we march on. Sometimes our hearts grow cold, but only for an instant. And so on till night, when, after the battle is over, we learn that the victory is ours, and that a sergent has been appointed; for yesterday, my dear cousin, I was made sergent. The sad part of it is to return to our tents, and find that the number of our comrades is less than the day before; that makes my heart heavy; but others are there, and we talk and talk till we fall asleep from exhaustion. Now, my dear cousin, my candle is going out. Yours, my dear cousin, with all my heart!"

As the abbé was reading the last of this, Denise came in.

"There's a gallant soldier, who knows what's what!" exclaimed Beauvais; "Denise, read this letter, — read it aloud; I should like to hear it again."

And Denise read it slowly, in her clear, well-modulated voice.

The abbé carelessly brushed the dust from his right sleeve, and looked down. When Denise had finished reading, she gave the letter back to her cousin, without saying a word.

“When he comes back to France,” said Beauvais, “you must write him to come and hunt with me, for such a fellow ought to enjoy hunting. There is some one who will know how to appreciate a horse ! ”

Denise, still silent, was folding the linen on the table. Beauvais went out, and the abbé went to read his breviary ; but he was absorbed in thought, for Denise had said nothing to the letter.

She, too, went out, absorbed in thought, and retreated to the garden to dream her dreams. She had said

nothing, but she had thought a great deal about the 'letter,' resounding with the noise of the war. She went over in her mind the proud, joyful language of the abbé's charge, and she tried to imagine how he looked sitting in his tent, polishing up his arms, or all equipped, with knapsack on his back, and fixed bayonet, rushing on the enemy. She thought of him again at evening, after supper, when she was leaning her elbow on the low wall in the orchard, from which the green valley of the Égronne could be seen as far as Pressigny.

The sun was going down behind Les Templiers, into the pine woods of Les Courtils, and Pressigny, half hidden by the poplars, and crowned by its slender tower, seemed transfigured by the last rays of the setting sun; the battlements

of the tower were rose-colored; the slated roofs were of a bright, clear violet; all the windows were a brilliant red; and Denise was dreaming of the Orient.

Then, looking toward Étableaux, with her eyes blinded by the sunlight and bright colors, she felt quite melancholy to see the valley already narrow and dark between its two slopes, covered with walnut trees and oaks. The faint, crystalline voice of the Égronne rose above the stillness of the evening, like a plaintive melody, accompanied at intervals by the peculiar bass of the tree-frogs. A shepherdess, wearing a black hood, was coming down the side of Étableaux, driving a herd of cows before her; the heifers lowed quietly, and the swift dog kept running from the shepherdess to the cattle, and at the

same time barking loudly, to which the dogs in the farm-houses made reply.

In a moment of silence the shepherdess began to sing, and her drawling voice, her rustic melody, came distinctly to the ears of Denise. The shepherdess was singing a local ballad, very popular in Touraine, the first stanzas of which were: —

“Here are three gallant lads *
Who for the war are starting,
Who for the war are starting,
To fight for hearth and home,
Each longing for his mistress,
Who is his heart’s delight.

“The youngest of the three
Is filled with deepest sorrow,
Is filled with deepest sorrow,
And well he may despair!
His mistress is the fairest
Of all the Lyons’ fair.”

Why did tears come to the eyes of Denise after this last verse? Why did she associate in her mind the melancholy story of "the youngest of the three" with the proud soldier, fighting far off in the Crimea? . . . Ah, if her cousin could have seen those precious tears fall!

When the Malakof Tower was taken, Daniel was made sergeant-major, and soon after returned to France. The abbé did not think it was yet time for him to come to him; but he wrote him to send his photograph, and doubled his monthly allowance for this purpose. Some weeks later, the picture came to Les Templiers. Daniel was represented bare-headed, with his right hand resting on the bayonet of his gun. The abbé's hand trembled so as he took the picture that it was ten minutes

before he was able to realize his ward's new appearance.

At last he recognized him, and was proud of him. He then went down and showed the picture to Beauvais and Denise.

“What a jolly fellow!” exclaimed Beauvais.

Denise examined silently the strong, young face, whose features stood out in brown against the milky background of the photograph. The innocent abbé was again troubled by her silence, and went back to console himself in his tower, where he hung the picture opposite his black cross. Yet, if the verbenas, with which the abbé's window was always carefully adorned in summer, — if the pink and purple verbenas could have spoken, they would have said that now they

were watered too much. When the abbé was gone for his daily walk, Denise deluged them with fresh water, without being aware of it, for her eyes were on the brown photograph hanging on the wall.

This is how matters stood. Beauvais was getting stouter every day. La Bruère was growing old and beginning to have times when she did not talk. Petit-Pinson was growing up, wearing his hat on one side, and showing himself off on Sundays in the square at Pressigny. The abbé's thoughts turned to Daniel as he was finishing Denise's education, and Denise, still very shy, was often found dreaming alone in the orchard. She was nearly eighteen.

One evening in July, 1857, after supper, Beauvais said seriously and tenderly, as he was kissing his daughter:—



“You are quite grown up now, my darling, — quite grown up, and I am getting old; I do not want you to be an old maid, and I am going to find a husband for you.”

Denise, confused for a moment, finally burst out laughing, and Beauvais went on in his deep voice: —

“What I am saying to you is very serious, and I want you to accustom yourself to the idea from this time forth. I have some one in view, and in a few days we will talk about it. . . .”

Deep silence ensued. Beauvais, imagining himself already separated from his daughter, rose to conceal his emotion, and went to visit his stable. Denise was crimson. The abbé, pale and embarrassed, muttered a few words, made a pretext of reading his breviary, and disappeared.

When he reached the tower the unhappy cousin shut himself in and locked the door. He was pale and wan, and the perspiration ran down his thin cheeks. He looked at Daniel's picture, and said aloud:—

“It is all over with our plans, my poor friend!”

Then he began to walk up and down, absorbed in thought. After some moments of silence he continued:—

“So the first comer will take Denise away from me; Beauvais will give her to him, and that will be the end of it! I fled to the seminary for fear of Beauvais, the threshing-machine took off my arm, I have brought up this child like my own daughter, and as compensation for it all, Beauvais will thank me heartily and throw her away to a stranger! . . . And he will have a

right to do so! After all, what authority have I; and are these plans that I have for her such as a priest ought to have? . . . Yes, but it breaks my heart to think of this marriage. They are going to snatch away my second Denise from me; I shall never see her again, except ceremoniously; she will go among strangers, and when my poor Daniel comes back, I shall not be able to give him the wife I had chosen for him; I shall not unite these two children, these two hearts that I had long ago designed for each other. I am stupid to be so timid. Why can I not speak to Beauvais, and tell him frankly about my plans? . . . Ah! Beauvais! . . . I hear this moment that ironical laugh of his which would greet my proposition. . . . If only Daniel had received his epaulets,—but an under-

officer. . . . Beauvais would never approve of that ! . . . No, that cannot be ; we are poor, and she is rich. I can say nothing ; they are rich ! . . .”

The abbé did not go to bed, and at dawn went out to breathe the fresh air. About eight o'clock, when Denise went up into the tower to water the verbenas, she noticed that the bed had not been disturbed, and wondered. . . .

Two days after, Beauvais came up into his cousin's room in the morning, and waking him suddenly said : —

“ Tell me, cousin, don't you know about it ? ”

“ No,” said the abbé, somewhat frightened.

“ Well, I will tell you,” continued Beauvais in a confidential manner, “ I have found a husband for Denise. . . . Can you guess who ? ”

The abbé opened his eyes so wide at this that he was frightful to look at.

“ I know what I am talking about,” Beauvais went on ; “ your nose and your mind are always in your books ; you do not know the country. . . . Did you not notice at the fair in Pressigny a young man that I talked with a long time near the bridge ? ”

“ Monsieur Delétang ? ”

“ Yes, the son of a merchant at Angles. They have spoken to me on the subject. He is rich, he is a farmer, and will be willing to live at Les Templiers. We shall keep our Denise with us. . . . Just now the young man is at Angers, and will not return for a month ; we will talk about it again, but mum is the word ! ”

He went out.

The abbé rose in haste, and with new

excitement. "No, no, no Delétang," he said to himself; "I must assert myself this time!"

And he hastened to write the following lines to Daniel: —

"Ask immediately for a three months' leave of absence; you are expected here to go hunting. Come as soon as possible!"

He took a hundred-franc note which he had in reserve, enclosed it in the letter, and hurried to the post-office at Pressigny.

When he returned his heart beat fast. He said abruptly to Beauvais in the presence of Denise: —

"I wrote my ward this morning to come and go hunting at Les Templiers, and I expect him before the end of the month."



CHAPTER V.

THREE weeks had scarcely gone when one morning, while the abbé was still in bed, he heard Beauvais's deep voice calling to him from the garden: —

“Hey ! Cousin !”

He ran to the window. Daniel in undress uniform, with his cap on one

side, a medal hanging from his button-hole, holding out his arms toward the tower, stood beside Beauvais. The abbé waved his mutilated arm with all his might, went back and dressed as fast as he could. He was just going downstairs when the door opened and Daniel and Beauvais rushed into the room. Oh, the return well repays the separation; they stood held fast in each other's arms for some time.

“Good heavens!” said Beauvais, quite touched, “are you going to eat each other? Come, Monsieur Daniel, let the cousin dress himself.”

The abbé made a hasty toilet, interspersed with exclamations of joy, and then went downstairs. He found no one but Beauvais in the court-yard.

“Go and find him,” said the latter gayly; “there he is, off over there.

And you did n't put him in the cavalry? "

"Why should I?" asked the cousin in amazement.

"Just imagine; I showed him my new horse, an animal that nobody has dared to mount."

"Well? "

"Well, he jumped on his back, and there he is, way over there."

The abbé and Beauvais started away from the farm. Daniel was coming toward them at full speed; his cane was still in his hand, but his cap had been left on the road. The horse was taken back to the stable, and then they went to look for the cap, then to Les Bruasseries, following the course of the Égronne as they talked, till they reached Pressigny. They had forgotten the time and the distance, while

asking questions, and answering them, in their surprises and exclamations. There were old memories to be recalled, jokes, bursts of laughter and delicious moments of silence. Beauvais would not have left the *major*, as he called Daniel, now for all the world. When they reached Pressigny, they felt that they were dying of thirst, and the abbé, with the others (*honnî soit qui mal y pense!*), went into the first wine-shop. They touched glasses.

“To the Crimean war!” said Beauvais.

“To the day of my return!” exclaimed Daniel.

He was never weary of looking at the abbé, and the abbé could not take his eyes off from Daniel. How changed they found each other! The one with his long, pale, wrinkled face,

hollow cheeks, his gentle smile, and gray hair; the other strong, straight, determined, everything about him seeming to say, *Forward, march!* with a frank, decided face, sparkling brown eyes, a youthful moustache, white teeth speaking of health, and black, curly hair. . . . The abbé was amazed, and said to Beauvais: —

“Do you see this boy? Well, I brought him up; I have carried him in my arms. . . . Do you remember about it?”

They came back slowly to Les Templiers by the way of Les Murets, and Beauvais made the remark that Denise would not know what had become of them.

“Who is she?” Daniel asked the abbé in a low voice.

“That is my daughter, my daughter

Denise ! ” exclaimed Beauvais, with pride.

“ Oh,” said Daniel, “ so you have a daughter? My cousin has not told me that.”

“ What did he write you about, then? I wager that he has not spoken only of my horses ! ”

“ Do you think I could write very long letters with my left hand? ” interrupted the abbé.

When they reached home, and Daniel wished to make his toilet, Beauvais pushed him into the hall. The table was laid, but Denise was not there. The abbé felt that he was getting red in the face. Daniel brushed himself as well as he could in front of the open window; Beauvais had sat down to the table. However, Denise soon made her appearance. She came in just as

Daniel had turned his back to the door.

“Have you prepared a good breakfast for us?” said Beauvais.

Daniel turned quickly round, and saw Denise. Both started slightly, betraying their mutual embarrassment. Daniel bowed respectfully, not timidly, nor yet with too much assurance; then they sat down at the table. He found his seat next Denise: but either he was embarrassed at seeing this young hostess, whom he had not counted on, or overcome by Denise’s somewhat proud manner, so that he did not enter into conversation. If he remained silent and constrained, it was not because he really felt calm, for during the first course he showed his agitation by breaking a dish which was offered him, before he had hardly touched it.

The color mounted to his forehead. "Pshaw! Pshaw!" said Beauvais; "never mind that!"

Denise took this opportunity to break the silence.

"That plate has been cracked for a long time," she said.

"Mademoiselle," . . . began Daniel, trying to make some excuse. They looked at each other, blushed more than ever, and again became silent. Fortunately, the abbé came to their aid, and changed the conversation.

"You have no relatives?" said the forgetful Beauvais to Daniel, although his cousin had told him twenty times his ward's history.

"No, sir," replied Daniel; "my father, who was a carpenter, was killed by falling from a roof, and my mother died a week later. . . ."

And he added, looking at the abbé :
“ It was our cousin who took me in.”

He said this with pride, and a simplicity quite touching to Beauvais.

“ Pardon me ! ” said he, with emotion.

The abbé was both glad and sorry at this explanation, and took advantage of it to press Daniel's hand once more. When dessert was brought on, the young girl left the dining-room. Then Beauvais lighted his pipe, Daniel rolled a cigarette, and they began to talk about the East and the war.

What was Denise doing in the meantime? Sitting under a wide-spreading fig-tree, at the end of the orchard, she seemed absorbed in watching the arabesques of light which the sun, coming through the trees, made on the sand; but if her eyes were attentively follow-

ing the mobile shadow-figures, her mind was elsewhere. The thoughts which absorbed her seemed to be of a very complex nature; for sometimes a sudden smile would pass over her lips, and then a deep flush would tinge her cheeks and forehead. Her pretty face expressed a strange mixture of joy and anxiety.

Denise was on the point of breaking with an ideal to which for some years she had been, as it were, betrothed. She had imagined Daniel quite different from what he was, and the transition from fancy to reality was at once sweet and hard to bear. In spite of the photograph sent to her cousin, the dark-complexioned young girl had pictured Daniel to herself as fair, with blue eyes, and a rather thoughtful face; the real Daniel had quite a different appearance.



He was small, slight, dark, and not at all melancholy. So the vague features of the old picture had to be effaced, and replaced by the living image of the original.

Although admitting that the Daniel in flesh and blood was quite equal to the imaginary Daniel, still Denise could not help a feeling of disappointment that her dream was not true. Then, ashamed of this persistent prejudice, she shook her head, passed her little hands over her blushing cheeks, and tried to give her thoughts another turn.

She looked over the wall at the fields of mown wheat. The note of a quail in the stubble-field reminded her that the season for hunting had just begun, and that Daniel had come to Les Templiers to hunt. She listened to the calls of the shepherdesses, and their

voices reminded her of the song of the "three gallant lads who for the war are starting," and the song made her think again of Daniel.

"Daniel! Daniel!" said the clear voice of the mill-dam; "Daniel!" cried the martins flying through the blue air like arrows. And so it went on till evening.

When night came Beauvais showed the sergeant to his room, and, pressing his hand, said, "Make yourself at home. Sleep well. To-morrow we will go together to visit my woods, and I will show you some game. Good night!"

While going to bed, after saying his prayers, the abbé felt quite reassured. "Monsieur Delétang is far away from here," he thought. "Daniel is established at Les Templiers. Now let us leave the rest to God."

The next day, when he came downstairs, the hunters had already gone. Denise complained of a headache, and seemed tired. The innocent abbé foolishly believed that she would talk to him about the visitor; but she said never a word, and he went away, quite disheartened, to read his breviary in the garden.

At noon Beauvais and Daniel returned, famished. Daniel distinguished himself by bringing back two partridges, of which the abbé seemed very proud. They sat down at table, and as they were now quite well acquainted with their guest, the conversation was brisk. Denise was affable and lively, and as she offered Daniel a dish, even ventured to say, with a smile, "This one is stronger!" and as it was necessary to look at her neighbor while

speaking, she was compelled to admit that brown eyes were more expressive than blue. She also noticed that Daniel was neither a fine talker nor as awkward as the usual visitors at Les Templiers, but that he had a grave, full voice, a frank, energetic manner of speech, and an inexhaustible fund of good-humor. But he always appeared to be aware of her presence, without seeming otherwise affected; and Denise, somewhat piqued, said to herself that the imaginary Daniel would certainly have been more friendly, and less interested in hares and partridges.

The day passed happily for all four, and still more happily passed the weeks which followed, each day bringing a successful hunt or some new pursuit.

The autumn was glorious. After their return in the evening, they re-

lated to Denise and the abbé the experiences of the day, and made plans for the next day's pleasure. If Denise asked for a hare, Daniel would not come home till he had a hare in his game-bag. Once he did not return till night-fall. He had hunted all day long, and had gone without his breakfast. But he had brought back a pheasant, a rare bird which Denise the day before had placed in the list of fabulous game.

Forgetting more and more her former ideal, Denise wondered how she ever could have had the poor taste to slander dark hair and brown eyes, and began to smile at her romantic dreams. She was awake in the morning, and secretly watched the hunters start off, and at evening, guessing the way they would return to Les Templiers, she went to meet them, accompanied by

her cousin. When still in the distance Daniel would draw his finest piece of game from his bag, and show it to her with a triumphant air.

A charming friendship soon sprang up between them. Denise had only to say a word to have her wishes divined and obeyed. She knew all Daniel's favorite songs, and sang them in the evening, in the orchard, without dreaming that she could be heard, as though she were singing for herself alone. At the slightest sign of approbation, she would stop short, like a frightened nightingale, and flee to the thickest clump of trees.

One evening, when Daniel was alone with the abbé, he asked, suddenly: "Is Monsieur Beauvais rich?"

"Yes," replied the abbé, in surprise; "but why do you ask?"

“He is rich! So much the worse, then,” said Daniel, and added: “If Mademoiselle Denise were poor, like myself, I should try to win her, and if she loved me, I should ask her father for her. I might settle down as a farmer at your Bruasseries, and it would be fine for us three to live together! . . . But she is rich; so I must knock down my card-house, and think of something else.”

“Think of what?” asked the abbé, anxiously.

“Of leaving Les Templiers, and the sooner the better.”

“Baffled again!” thought the poor abbé, seeing for a second time that his sweet dreams threatened to vanish in smoke. His conscience forbade him from interfering with Daniel’s plan of departure, and his heart bled as he

thought of this new obstacle, which he ought to have foreseen. He passed a miserable, sleepless night.

The next day was destined to be worse still. Beauvais and Daniel had gone hunting, and the abbé was reading Saint Augustine on the front porch. About the middle of the afternoon a carriage, driven by a young man, cautiously entered the court-yard, and stopped a few steps away from him. The young man asked for M. Beauvais, and gave his name: it was M. Delétang. When he discovered that Beauvais was not at home, he breathed a sigh of relief, and was going away; but the abbé thought it proper to insist on his getting out of his carriage. He made him go into the house, and presented him to Denise.

He was rather a countrified-looking

fellow, in spite of his city dress. He was neither dark nor light, quite good-looking, but timid as a young girl just



out of a convent, and pitifully awkward. The abbé, proud to find a timidity greater than his own, took pity on his embarrassment, and tried to put him at his ease. Denise, suspecting nothing,

tried to be less shy than usual. The suitor sat on the edge of a chair, talking in monosyllables, for nearly an hour, twisting his moustache, and looking all the time at the abbé, to whom, in his heart, he vowed eternal gratitude. At last he rose to go, and not till then did he make the object of his visit known. He had come, at his father's request, to invite the whole family to a fair at Angles, which was to take place the following week. Having delivered his message, he bowed, tried the wrong door twice, and finally got into his carriage, which was soon heard rolling past the windows.

When Beauvais returned, the abbé gave him an account of M. Delétang's visit, and conveyed the invitation to him.

“Ah! ah!” said Beauvais, with an

air of mingled playfulness and mystery. Then he looked knowingly at the unhappy abbé.

“ Ah! ah! . . . Well, we will go to Angles, all four of us. I will have the *char-à-bancs* cleaned, and write a word to father Delétang. Denise, darling, put on your prettiest dress; major, exercise your legs, for there will be dancing, — yes, abbé, there will be dancing.”



CHAPTER VI.

THURSDAY of the following week, in the early morning, *fin matin* as they say in Touraine, the *char-à-bancs*, drawn by the best horse Les Templiers afforded, started away in the direction of Angles. Beauvais and Daniel, on the front seat, took turns in driving, and exchanged remarks on the gait and appearance of the horse. The abbé and Denise, under the hood, looked at

the landscape in silence. They passed through the woods of Les Courtils. It was a mild morning. The country was partially veiled in smoke, but the rising sun penetrated through the thin vapor. Above the travellers' heads, the sky was already growing blue, a cool wind was sougning through the pine branches, and the first yellow leaves were falling under the carriage wheels.

Denise, wrapped in a brown shawl, sat back in one corner and listened to the merry conversation of Beauvais and Daniel. The abbé, full of sadness, watched the dry leaves flying about. He saw them come down from the branches, whirl for a moment in the air, and fall silently on the road.

"Autumn has come," he thought, "the end of the festival of the year, and also the end of my joys and illu-

sions!" He was seized with alarm at every turn of the wheel which brought them nearer to Angles, and just as the distance diminished, his agony of mind increased. Urged on by the voices of Beauvais and Daniel, the horse went like the wind. They were already passing along the banks of the poplar-bordered Creuse. With an escort of barking dogs the carriage entered the streets of the village on the full trot. The abbé trembled and looked anxiously from Daniel to Denise, so near to each other, so beautiful, so young, so content with life. Perhaps it was the last day that he should see these two children of his heart together. . . .

Since Monsieur Delétang had not appeared in person, the abbé believed that this matrimonial phantom would

vanish in smoke; but now that they were really going to Angles, and in an hour's time would be in the suitor's own house, the matter was growing serious; and knowing how little he could count on Daniel's initiative, and mistrusting his own courage, the abbé was disconsolate and in despair. Denise smiled as she looked at the heath bathed in sunlight, the robins crossing the road, and Daniel in uniform. The carriage sped along like an arrow.

Now the steep roofs of the town came in sight through the trees; now they could hear the indistinct noise of the fair. Soon they were in full sight of Angles.

The houses came down in gay terraces to the road, which wound between two walls of green and crossed the river by a wooden bridge.

On the other side of the way, on a steep, rocky hill, rose the fine gray ruins of a castle of the time of Richard Cœur de Lion, and the ruins were dominated by a platform, in the centre of which rose a cross. The carriage, still going at full speed, entered the principal street, followed by a crowd of people in their Sunday attire. At the large gate of Delétang's place stood the master of the house and a large number of invited guests, and at each new arrival this vanguard gave a vigorous hurrah as a sort of welcome. The yard was already full of country equipages arranged in two rows.

In a moment Beauvais's carriage was surrounded, unharnessed, and placed among this curious museum of vehicles. Monsieur Delétang senior, a jolly little bustling man, who was as

talkative as his son was reticent, took possession of Beauvais. Delétang junior, trembling, offered his arm to Denise, and the abbé and Daniel remained behind, somewhat forgotten, and feeling out of place.

The breakfast was ready. They went to the hall filled with guests. There was a collection of countrymen from the different districts of Berri and Poitou, raisers of cattle and horses, most of them in frock coats, some in new blouses and broad-brimmed



straw hats, all people with good teeth, thick-set, with ruddy complexions, quick at repartee, and laughing so loud as to make the windows rattle and the glasses jingle.

Denise was seated between the two Delétangs in front of the abbé, whose sombre cassock and pale countenance contrasted strangely with the motley costumes and blooming faces. Attention was soon drawn to the end of the long table, where Daniel, who had quickly broken the ice, was putting everybody in good spirits by his sallies and animation. Beauvais's hearty, prolonged laugh was heard above the chorus of merry voices. This merriment frightened the abbé. As for Denise, she laughed without knowing why, and made a mental comparison between the silence of her young neighbor and the live-

liness of the sergeant, not altogether to the advantage of the former.

When dessert was brought on the young people left the table, and went to the place where the fair was held. The square was situated near the church, and overlooked the deep, narrow valley where the Englin flows. It was planted with large acacia-trees, set out in groups of five. Oxen, heifers, and horses, collected around the first group of trees and watched by small children, announced the festival by their lowing and loud bellowing. Then two rows of tents were seen, under the shade of which people were drinking at tables. They were sucking their wine and talking at the top of their voices. Occasionally a voice would come forth from one of the tents and strike up an interminable wail in a drawling tone.

The least ray of sunlight penetrating these places of shelter made the faces within look crimson and the eyes as if on fire, while those in shadow took on a soft, mysterious coloring.

Here and there kitchens in full blast sent up clouds of smoke. The venders of *fouaces* and *tourtisseaux** were surrounded by children, rogues with wide-open eyes, and jealous lovers trying to offer their sweethearts the largest possible piece of pastry. In Poitou a *tourtisseau* costing two sous given by a lad to a girl is equivalent to a declaration of love.

While Monsieur Delétang and Denise were together breaking a *fouace* — a bold venture, which made the young man blush to the whites of his eyes —

* Different kinds of sweetcakes popular in Poitou.



a long, hilarious shout arose from the crowd gathered around a tall pole, to the top of which were fastened several struggling, fluttering pigeons.

“Well done!” they cried, crowding around Daniel, who gayly held up a pigeon the cord of which he had just broken with a gun-shot.

“Now for another!” said Daniel, and seizing the loaded gun he shouldered it, leaned his dark cheek against the butt-end, pulled the trigger, and this time two pigeons fell panting to the ground.

“A double shot!” he exclaimed with delight. The amazed crowd of people applauded all the more vehemently when the young man presented his pigeons to three worthy old women who were looking at them with longing eyes.

Denise was very proud of this achievement, and the poor M. Delé-tang felt more insignificant and awkward than ever. He would not have touched the gun for all the world.

Farther along, in a square formed by four acacia-trees, the ball was in progress. A hurdy-gurdy player and a bagpiper, stationed on two casks in the shade of the largest tree, conducted the dancing. The hurdy-gurdy player, seated astride a stool, had thrown open his waistcoat; he was absorbed in his music. He turned his handle energetically, and marked the cadences with a slight swaying of his head. After each repetition he manifested his delight by a grimace which made his spectacles fall off his nose; at the same time he held carefully between his legs a half-filled bottle.

The bagpiper, tall and thin, with a long face shaded by a wide-brimmed straw hat, stood up and blew with all seriousness into his strange, curious instrument.

At their feet boys and girls were fluttering about in fine confusion; the girls were holding up their printed calico skirts with the tips of their fingers, while each of the boys, with his free hand, clung fast to his red umbrella, an object of luxury, a highly prized and inseparable companion.

They scorned the local bourrée and were trying the figures of the quadrille, but the old habit kept asserting itself, and the step of the bourrée was constantly reappearing.

When Daniel, Denise, and M. Delé-tang drew near to the scene of the ball Daniel exclaimed: —

“Let us dance!”

“But,” replied Denise, “I do not know the contra-dance; I only know the bourrée that La Bruère has taught me.”

“Well, we will dance the bourrée, then. M. Delétang shall be your partner, and I will very quickly find one for myself.”

He noticed a woman, still fresh and nimble, who was watching the dance with interest, and seemed all ready to take part in it. Her eyes sparkled, her head swayed to and fro, her whole body kept time to the music, and her feet could not be still.

“Do you know the bourrée, *ma mère*?” said Daniel to her.

“Ah! my dear fellow, do I know it? I used to be the finest dancer in all the country.”

“Well, will you dance with me?”

As the contra-dance had come to an end, he hastened to ask the two players for a bourrée, and whether she would or not, he led the good woman next to Denise and her companion.

At the first signal from the hurdy-gurdy player they all four started in, and the other dancers followed their example. The old woman skipped about as though she were only twenty. Denise was as light as a bird; her tiny feet scarcely touched the ground as they glided over it. Her cheeks, animated with pleasure, were crimson; her blue eyes were full of light, and her lips wore a smile.

As she moved a little more quickly to clap her hands before offering them to her opposite neighbor, her thick brown hair became partly unfastened,

and fell from under her wide straw hat over her shoulders.

“How beautiful she is!” thought Daniel, with enthusiasm. And Denise noticed with admiration how quick the young soldier was to catch the rhythm and step of the bourrée, and how gayly he stamped his heel on the ground, turning with such ease and agility, to clap his hands in response. She quite pitied the timid Monsieur Delétang, who became confused, and got out of step every few moments.

While Daniel and Denise were dancing under the acacias, the abbé’s sadness had redoubled, and as his wounded heart could not adjust itself to the gay commotion of the fair, he had gone toward the old castle. Following the rocky footpath, he had climbed above the ruins and was sitting

at the foot of the large wooden cross overlooking the now ruinous towers, the village, and the entire valley.

The wind still brought to him, in puffs, the noise of the festival, and the sound of the orchestra, and at each burst of music and clamor of voices his heart swelled and his eyes filled with tears. Was not his last hope taken away from him? . . .

“It is all over,” he thought, “and Delétang will take her away. It will be of no use now for me to open my heart to Beauvais and beg him to give Denise to Daniel, for he would only laugh me in the face. What could my poor sergeant avail, placed in the balance with the son of the rich Delétang? And then, besides, Denise has not yet shown any preference for Daniel, and Daniel himself is too

proud to risk making the least advance."

And folding his arms across his narrow breast, he lifted his eyes toward the pure, deep heavens.

"Oh, Denise," he said, "is your daughter to belong to a stranger? Is this last bond which unites us to be broken? . . . I have done what I could."

He turned toward the great, outstretched arms of the black cross, and added in thought: —

"God, who placed Daniel in my path, and brought me near to Denise's daughter, can still unite these two children, in spite of everything, if he will. I put my last hope in him. . . ."

The sun gradually sank behind the wooded hill; the river now reflected the rosy tints of sunset. The abbé

still remained wrapt in thought at the foot of the cross. Suddenly he heard



some one call him, and saw Daniel running, all out of breath.

“The horse is harnessed,” he exclaimed. “They are waiting for you, cousin !”

They went down the hill together. Denise was already in the carriage. Beauvais, looking excited and gay, gave a hearty grasp of the hand to both Monsieur Delétang and his son.

"I shall expect you next Sunday!" he said, getting into his seat beside Daniel, and when the abbé had taken his place, Beauvais cracked the whip over the horse's back, and they started off at full speed.

The sky was thick with stars. Denise, still full of excitement over the dancing, but silent, leaned back in her corner. The abbé closed his eyes, and turned his thoughts to prayer. Daniel, too, seemed to be dreaming. As for Beauvais, the white wine and generous hospitality of the Delétangs had put him in good humor. His voice was loud and his laugh boister-

ous. From time to time he stopped talking to crack his whip, and the horse, having slackened his pace for a moment, started on all the more swiftly. His freshly shod feet clattered over the noisy road and struck fire in the darkness of the night.

This horse — “a priceless animal,” as Beauvais said — had but one small fault: he was timid as a hare, and when frightened, would run straight ahead.

They had gone two-thirds of the distance, when the horse took fright at the reflection of the moonlight in a puddle of water, just as they were coming into the village of Barrou. He pricked up his ears, shied, gave a loud snort, and then started to run, and rushed through the village like a hurricane.

Beauvais, knowing that the road as

it led out of Barrou, bordering the Creuse, makes a sudden turn, struggled to hold him in, and pulled the reins with all his might. At an unexpected jolt they broke, and the horse, feeling his liberty, increased his infernal gallop, threatening each moment to throw the carriage over the bank into the Creuse.

Pale and with compressed lips, Denise clung to the back of the seat against which Daniel was leaning; he turned around, and saw her white face in the moonlight. Suddenly rising, he leaped like a cat on the horse's back, seized the ends of the broken lines, and at the risk of being killed twenty times, glided forward, and hung from the animal's head. For some moments he was dragged along by the horse; but as he had muscles of steel, he

braced himself more and more, till he compelled the creature to slacken its speed. Finally it stopped, conquered and all of a tremble.

The travellers got out of the carriage; the abbé hurried to Daniel, and seeing that he was safe and sound and smiling, he went back to Denise, who sat shivering and speechless by the side of the road. Beauvais, quite crest-fallen at the unparalleled behavior of his horse, walked around the carriage, decided that it was injured, and announced that he must go back to Barrou to have it repaired.

Denise got up and declared that nothing in the world would induce her to get into the carriage again.

“Don't be troubled, darling,” replied Beauvais, very sweetly; “it is only two short leagues from here to Les

Templiers, and by going across Les Courtils, you can make the distance still shorter. You are all good walkers, and it is a fine night. I will go alone to Barrou, and lead the horse by the bridle, and in two hours at the longest we shall be at home again."

"Well, then," said the abbé, somewhat embarrassed, "Daniel may go with you, while Denise and I go across."

"Certainly not," replied Beauvais, in his sarcastic tone; "you are too absent-minded, cousin, and the major already knows the roads better than you do. He will escort you. Well, good luck to you. I will see you later."

He turned his horse around, and disappeared in the direction of Barrou.

All three stood motionless for a moment on the road; then the abbé,

who saw in all this the finger of God, said to Daniel: —

“Well, offer your arm to Denise. I have a bad habit of liking to walk by myself, and I will serve as rear guard.”

They went slowly up the rocky path leading past Les Courtils. At first they all walked together, talking of the accident and describing their sensations. Denise was never weary of admiring Daniel's presence of mind and energy, and she expressed her admiration most sincerely and naïvely.

“He was always a daring fellow,” said the abbé, and he related how, as quite a child, Daniel had mounted a very fiery horse, and had been brought home to his house half-dead.

At the top of the hill the abbé stopped, out of breath, and sat down

at the foot of a tree. Busy with their talk, the young people merely walked a little more slowly, and went along into the woods. The abbé watched them as they passed on under the branches. The moonlight bathed their young heads. He sighed deeply, and thought of what had just taken place. Surely God had had the goodness to listen to him, and the accident was the result of Providential intention. Daniel and Denise were made for each other, and it was God's will to unite them. All this was plain.

Trusting in his charge's uprightness, and feeling as sure of Daniel and Denise as of himself, the abbé remained sitting under the tree, and watched the couple disappear in the oak woods. Ten minutes after, a merry whoop, the call of two fresh young voices, rung out in

the quiet night. The abbé replied feebly, but did not move.

Meanwhile the two young people were penetrating a covered path where the interlacing branches formed a lattice-work of light and shade, and talking they walked on under this bower, partly in darkness and partly in light. They smiled, and spoke of indifferent matters, but in the depth of their hearts they felt a strange, sweet uneasiness.

Their light feet scarcely grazed the smooth, fine turf, tinted a bluish hue by the moonlight. Each felt the gentle pressure of the other's arm; their voices rang out alternately in the night like the song of two nightingales rising in harmony, or mounted together toward heaven like two wood-pigeons taking flight. Sometimes they were both silent at the same time, and in the stillness

which followed, they heard in the distance, borne on the evening air, the melancholy murmuring of the waters of the Creuse.

Daniel's heart was bursting with emotion, and he could contain himself no longer.

"What a wonderful night!" he exclaimed. These four words, and the manner in which they were spoken, expressed so much tenderness and depth of feeling that the young girl bent her head, and felt embarrassed. However, she had to make some reply.

"Don't you think," she said, in a trembling voice, "that this noise of the water is like dance music in the distance?"

"Do you like dancing?" asked Daniel.

"I don't know. It was the first time I ever went to a dance, but I enjoyed it."

“Better than M. Delétang, for he hopped about as though he were out of place.”

“And out of time, too,” she added, with a laugh. “Poor fellow! he looked forlorn in his new frock coat.”

“Now don’t make fun of him,” said Daniel. “You must n’t laugh at your betrothed.”

“My betrothed! What an idea!”

Daniel looked at her as if to ask, “Do you mean what you say?” . . . “But,” he replied, “I believe that is Monsieur Beauvais’s idea.”

Denise shook her head. Daniel smiled sadly.

“When I come again to Les Templiers, I shall probably find a great change.”

“Dear me!” murmured Denise; “you speak of coming again as if

you were just on the point of going away. Your three months are not over yet. Are you very fond of the military life?"

"I have been very fond of it," replied the young man, "and now it seems both attractive and distasteful to me. There are times when I am sorry that I did not become a farmer in good earnest, and live on some *borderie** hidden among the trees. . . . Les Bruasseries, for instance, would be a good place to live in! . . . I should n't want more than four acres of land and a vineyard sloping down toward the valley."

"With a meadow at the foot, and an osier-plot on the edge of the water," added Denise.

"And in the meadow," he continued,

* A small farm.

“a good stout horse to travel across the fields with; around the house, an orchard and pastures. . . .”

“And,” she said, “in the pastures great chestnut-trees, under the shade of which to work. . . .”

“While the cows chewed their cud as they lay on the grass. . . .”

“Yes,” she went on, innocently carrying out the dream he had begun, “two cows, with great, brown eyes, and a white heifer, because we should need milk. . . .”

She stopped, confused at her mistake, and stammered. Daniel felt his heart beat as though it would burst. *We!* . . . She had said it! The sound of the word still caressed his ear. He suddenly seized both the young girl's hands in his own, and opened his lips to speak; then as suddenly relaxed his

grasp, and repressed the words he was ready to utter.

“Ah! why are you rich?” he exclaimed with bitterness. “Why are you rich? That puts a distance between us greater than the thousand leagues that separated us when I was in the Crimea. . . . Still, I love you! I ought to have gone away without telling you so; but for two weeks the words have been on my lips, and I could keep them back no longer.”

They went on walking slowly, and Denise listened to him as he talked, and her beautiful eyes sparkled through her tears. When Daniel's last words had penetrated the young girl's heart as a dew-drop rolls between the petals of a flower, she remained silent for a moment, then said, in a steady voice, though vibrating with restrained emotion: —

“Am I rich? I really did not know it. The thought has never come into my mind. I have grown up at Les Templiers without knowing the meaning of money, and without thinking of asking about it. I only know one thing, that my heart is above all question of money. I understand you, because I am as proud as you are, and granting that my father is rich, if you would love me better as a poor girl, I will become poor for your sake. . . . I ought not to tell you all this; but you know it. I am unsophisticated, and cannot conceal my thoughts.”

These simple, frank words were spoken in a tone denoting a will-power which Daniel had never suspected. He seized Denise's hands again, and looking her in the face, said: —

“I thank you, and I admire you;

but I feel the color rising to my cheeks as I think what your father would say if I should ask him for your hand."

"My father," — and she smiled as she looked down, — "my father is not so terrible as his abrupt manner would lead one to suppose. Besides, he has a high opinion of you, and he loves me. . . . He will give his consent."

"But in his eyes," Daniel continued, "I should seem as though I were seeking a dowry!"

"Ah," she added, reproachfully, "you are too proud, and I shall believe that you love yourself better than you love me. Can you not bend your pride a little for love of me? Besides, there is our cousin, who will be our ally and plead our cause."

"Yes, yes," exclaimed Daniel, "the cousin is good and wise, and I will tell

him everything to-morrow. . . . What !” he exclaimed, with disappointment in his voice, “here we are, already at the end of the woods !”

’T was true, the underbrush was growing thinner, and here and there appeared great carpets of purple heath shining in the moonlight. Denise had taken Daniel’s arm again, and a delightful talk followed the feverish



excitement of their first confession of love. They exchanged confidences, and opened their hearts to each other, over and over again. The abbé would have been paid a hundred-fold for having been so deceived, and for his agony of mind, if he could have seen them, this bril-

liant night, walking slowly through the grassy pasture, while the calves and cows, crouched down in their *dormoirs*, half rose as they passed by, and lowing softly looked at them.

The dew of the night and the moonlight enveloped them like a misty halo. Drops of dew fell from the branches, and rolled into their hair, sparkling there like glow-worms. Both were young, both were deep in love, both full of life and hope, and in the stillness of the night all nature seemed to tremble with gladness to see them advance.

So they came unconsciously to the dark bank of the Iégronne, and saw the roof of Les Templiers shining in the moonlight. A cock crowed in the farm-yard. They both were filled with regret to reach the end of their walk, and they moved more and more slowly.

Suddenly the voice of some young peasant, returning from the fair, reached their ears, from the depths of the valley below. He was singing an ancient ballad, very popular and always new, the song of Juliet to Romeo, the song that is always found where there are lovers, — that is, everywhere, in the defiles of Sicily* and on the heaths of Poitou. The voice sang: —

“They had not been
Together fifteen minutes —
When hark! the lark was singing high!
Dear lark, thou art not truthful;
Thy song doth lie!
'Tis only midnight now, I say,
And not the day!”

* “Ah! rondinella bella
Tu fai da gran bugiarda:
Hai cominciato a cantar
E non si vede l'alba.”

Sicilian folk song.

Pretty, pretty swallow!
Thou art a lying fellow:
Thy morning song one learns
Before the rosy dawn appears.

N. H. D.

They looked at each other and smiled, and then, after pressing each other's hands for a last time, hastened on. The abbé and Beauvais were walking in the court-yard. The light of a blazing fire gleamed ruddy through the kitchen windows.

“Well,” exclaimed Beauvais in his deep, jovial voice, “did n't I tell you that your cousin would let you get lost? What a man he is! If I had not met him and picked him up, he would be in the woods still, late as it is.”



CHAPTER VII.

THAT night it was Daniel's turn not to sleep. He was up before daylight. He had agreed with Denise to speak on this very day to the abbé, and to ask him then to approach Beauvais; but as the time for explanation drew near, the young man felt a new sentiment, till then unknown, spring up within him. He was afraid of the abbé. As soon as he heard him moving about in his room, he took his gun and went

off hunting, all the time reproaching himself for his cowardice.

At noon he had not returned, and they sat down at table without him. The meal was a silent one. Denise, anxious and troubled, kept looking toward the court-yard and spoke only in monosyllables. Beauvais looked as embarrassed and comically serious as though he were carrying a state secret and were not accustomed to it. The abbé, weary in body and mind, ate little and did not talk at all.

After dessert he went up into his tower, and left the father and daughter alone. Beauvais folded his napkin, took out his pipe, lighted it solemnly, and looking at his daughter very seriously, said: —

“Well, Denise, how did you like Monsieur Delétang?”

“The father?” asked the girl, mischievously.

“No, the son.”

“Oh, I found him—very polite and very proper.”

“Very good!” exclaimed Beauvais; “very good! and as he pleased you, I am coming straight to the point. Yesterday father Delétang and I planned to marry you two. What do you say to it?”

Denise was sitting down; she rose, blushed, and said very gravely:—

“What! father, did you pledge my word without consulting with me?”

“Well, not exactly pledged it,” replied Beauvais, somewhat astonished, “but I supposed you would give your consent, and consequently invited all the Delétangs to come here next Sunday.”

“In that case,” said Denise, with de-

cision, "you must write them not to come, for I do not wish M. Delétang for a husband."

"That makes quite a difference! And why not, mademoiselle?"

"Because I do not love him."

"Bah! Bah! stuff and nonsense! You do not love anybody, not even your own father!"

She rose, threw her arms around his neck, sat down on his knee, took the pipe out of his hands, and said coaxingly: —

"Yes, I love you well, my darling father, but don't speak so loud, and let us talk reasonably. You want me to marry, do you? And yet you want me to stay with you? And I wish so too. . . ."

"What then?" said Beauvais. Denise continued: —

“This M. Delétang is always on the road, on account of his business. He would take me with him, and you would be left alone. . . . But would you like to know the real, honest truth? Well, I would much rather have some one like — like M. Daniel.”

Beauvais was astounded by this revelation. He pushed his daughter quickly away from him, walked across the room without saying a word, then all of a sudden burst forth like a bomb: —

“The sergeant-major? Heavens! he has n’t a sou to his name! Who has put such an idea into your head? . . . A non-commissioned officer! . . . ”

“He is going to be an officer.”

“I thought you did n’t want to leave me?”

“Well, he will send in his resignation.”

“Leave me alone!” exclaimed Beauvais, in exasperation. “It is the abbé who has been the cause of this fine love affair!”

Denise approached her father slowly, compelled him to stop, and said, much agitated: —

“Speak lower, father! You know that I always tell the truth. Well, I assure you that the abbé has never spoken to me about his charge.”

“Indeed! Indeed! he has spoken wonderfully without saying a word! You see what this cousin is that I took for a kind of a text-book! He has done well!”

“Father —”

“Leave me!” interrupted Beauvais, much irritated. “Go to your room and think over what I have said.”

“It has all been thought over,”

replied Denise sadly, but also with decision. "I shall not marry at all."

She went out and took refuge under the trees in the orchard. Beauvais, in strange agitation, walked up and down the hall for a long time, gesticulating, growling, and muttering to himself. Then suddenly he went up to the abbé's quarters and found him reading his journal.

"There you are, you man of mysteries!" he exclaimed.

"What do you mean?" asked the amazed cousin.

"I mean that Denise refuses M. Delé-tang, because her head is full of your sergeant-major."

The abbé tried to make some reply, blushed, and said nothing.

"Why don't you speak?"

The abbé rose, looked Beauvais in

the face, and finally said to him with ardor: —

“Yes, I have been mysterious, if it is mysterious to have secretly desired the marriage of my ward to Denise for seven years. Yes, I had Daniel come here with the hope that he would please Denise, and that she would please him. I intended to wait till he should be made an officer, because I didn't wish to offer you anything lower, but Delétang crossed my path, and I wrote Daniel to come at once. Yes, I wished to take your Denise from you, as you took my cousin from me. This idea has possessed me for a long time, and consoled me in my sorrow. Daniel is my own child; I was born for family life, and if, contrary to my vocation, I took orders, it was because you forced me to do so. If Daniel is here

to-day, you are the indirect cause of it, and if Denise loves my child, it is a just dispensation of Providence. I have been mysterious. I will be so no longer. If my Daniel does not please you, it is enough. Let us keep the secret to ourselves. We will part. If I have been mysterious with you, I have been equally so with Denise and Daniel, and I should be forever mortified if my ward were to hear me."

"Cousin," replied Beauvais, gravely, "one would suppose that you too were in love."

"I am," replied the abbé, "I have been in love with my dream for seven years."

Beauvais went to open the window. He was suffocating. He looked into the garden and saw Daniel just coming in, and called him. The abbé, alarmed,

started forward, and was going to bolt the door, but Beauvais stopped him.

“ Let him come up,” he said calmly.

“ Beauvais,” replied the abbé, in a low voice, “ send us away, but do not humiliate him ! ”

“ Sit down and be quiet ! ” said Beauvais, sharply.

“ My life is in your hands,” murmured the abbé, dropping into a chair.

Daniel came in, looking rather pale, but calm and resolute. Beauvais walked up and down the room for a moment, then, stopping in front of the young man, said : —

“ I wanted to have your advice about something we have just been discussing. This is it. I have a relative, who has the reputation of being very rich, and has a marriageable daughter. This young girl is loved

and sought for by a very poor young man. . . . ”

Here Daniel interrupted him.

“Monsieur,” he said, “I see that you know all. Yes, I love your daughter, and as you have just remarked, I am very poor; I understand you, so spare me the mortification of an explanation which I can guess.”

“You have neither understood nor guessed anything,” interrupted Beauvais. “Let me finish. My relative, as I told you, has the reputation of being rich, but all that glitters is not gold. He has houses and lands, but he is over head and ears in debt, and his property is covered with mortgages. In a year or two it will be seized and sold; my relative will find himself then without resources, and his daughter without a dowry. What do you think

the very poor young man ought to do?"

"Cousin," exclaimed Daniel in a shrill voice, "will you give me a lease of your Bruasseries?"

"You know very well that it is yours," said the abbé, opening his eyes wide, and no longer understanding what was going on.

Daniel then drew near to Beauvais, and in a firm but gentle voice, said: —

"If I were the young man of whom you speak, monsieur, I should go to the young girl's father, as I come to you now, and I should say to him: 'I am young, I am strong, I am accustomed to country life, and I have a friend who is willing to entrust me with a farm in excellent condition, well supplied with implements and well fruited. Give me your daughter, and we two will

work to give you back a portion of your lost fortune.' ”

As he listened to Daniel, Beauvais grew red in the face, his lips trembled, the veins in his forehead swelled, and he seemed to be deeply moved. He walked across the room again, and when he reached the window, looked toward the orchard.

“Denise,” he cried in his loudest voice.

After a few minutes Denise came in, in great agitation. She was alarmed to see the solemn faces of Beauvais and the abbé, and Daniel looking so excited; she tried to speak, and the words died away on her lips.

“Denise,” said Beauvais, pointing to Daniel, “there is a foolish fellow, who is willing to marry you without a dowry; do you give your consent?”

The young girl looked radiantly at her father, and threw her arms around his neck.

“Leave me alone!” he said in a choking voice. “If you both give your consent, doesn’t the fact that you are both poor frighten you? I assure you that what I have told you is serious; it is no pretty story such as you see in plays.”

“I am taking it seriously,” replied Daniel. “I have been in love with Denise for more than a month, but the fear of seeming to be a fortune hunter compelled me to be silent. I intended to go away without letting my feelings be known, and I should have done so but for the accident yesterday and your statement to-day.”

“So,” said Beauvais, somewhat piqued, “if Denise were still rich, you would

think twice before asking me for her? you would be afraid to marry her, would you?"

"Certainly, monsieur."

"Oh, that is a little too much," exclaimed Beauvais, whose homely face was beginning to look irritated; and besides he could no longer play a rôle so humiliating to him; "that is a little too much! Don't you suppose one can do more good about him with a fortune than without a sou in the world? Money is money, and poverty leads to nothing. By my faith, your reasoning breaks me all up, and I would refuse to give Denise to you now if I had not given you my word. Eh! Do you believe, proud as you are, that I would give her to you, if I were as ruined as I have led you to suppose? No, no! nothing with nothing causes

unhappiness, and when there is no hay in the loft the asses kick! . . . Denise has enough for two, thank God!"

"But Daniel is not absolutely poor," the abbé ventured to remark, as he at last understood what they were talking about, and was recovering his serenity; "my Bruasseries are a little something and worth at least twenty-five thousand francs. . . ."

"Who is talking about your Bruasseries?" quickly interrupted Beauvais. "That would be a great consolation to us if I were ruined! but I am not, thank God! I am not. Come," he said to Denise, "come, Miss Perversity, kiss your lover! If your mother were here she would weep for joy. . . as I do!"

Indeed, the rough Beauvais could control his emotion no longer, and

the hot tears were flowing down his cheeks. Daniel imprinted his first kiss on Denise's forehead, then kissed the abbé and Beauvais.

When all four were calm and had wiped their red eyes they went down together into the garden. La Bruère was spreading out the linen. Denise took Daniel's hand, led him to the old servant, and said joyfully: —

“Bruère, here is my future husband!”

La Bruère clasped her hands: “Ah, my darling! Ah! my good people! So much the better! I said to myself, ‘What can they all be doing up there together? Monsieur le curé's room hardly holds four people. . . .’”

But the lovers had no time to listen to her, and did not wait; they sped away together through the orchard.



CHAPTER VIII.

IT was the evening of Denise's wedding. . . . The hurdy-gurdy and the bagpipe were playing in the garden under the windows of the large hall, filled with people and the hum of voices. Beauvais could not let a moment of this day pass without music. He wanted the air and the walls of Les

Templiers to be as gay as he was himself.

Nearly a hundred people were seated at two immense tables brightly lighted with a double row of candles. Beauvais sat at one of the tables, surrounded by the older people, — distant relatives, farmers and their wives from the neighboring districts. At the other sat the newly married couple and the abbé, wreathed about with blooming young people. They had gathered in Presigny and from the neighboring farms all those over fifteen and under twenty-five years old.

At the end of the hall was still a third table, and the noisiest, filled with children, with the little folk. The bagpiper and the hurdy-gurdy player could hardly be heard above the noise of voices, laughter, and the jingling of glasses;

still the harmony of these instruments formed a sort of vibrating background to the tumultuous joy of the banquet.

Les Templiers breathed forth a rich perfume of hospitality and abundance. Servants were constantly running to and fro. They were constantly bringing new dishes in their outstretched hands, and mingling their gayety with the gayety of the guests. Wine flowed freely. The guests conversed in groups of two or three or more, then all together at a table, and from one table to another. The older people argued, discussed, drank each other's health, while the young folk laughed, conversed merrily, and talked of love. Now and then, a word, or a whole sentence, was heard distinctly above the hubbub. Sometimes a whole table would burst into loud laughter.

In the midst of this noise there was a sort of oasis of silence where the bridal couple and the abbé were. There everything was sweet and quiet. "Denise — Daniel — Cousin" were murmured low. More frequently a smile, or a prolonged look, translated their thoughts. Denise was absorbed in her happiness, as she sat dressed in white tulle, wearing natural orange-blossoms in her brown hair, her face pale and innocent, her eyes sparkling and yet thoughtful.

Daniel was dressed in black. He had left off his uniform, never to put it on again. His strong, beaming, sunburnt face contrasted with his dark clothes. He hardly took his eyes away from Denise, and she, charming in her agitation, occasionally looked around at the throng of invited guests. The abbé did not

see the guests; he saw nothing but the bridal pair. His admiration was beyond words. He asked himself whether he were not dreaming. His joy was unspeakable, and yet a strange touch of sadness was mingled with it.

A mother is never gay on her child's wedding-day. The hurdy-gurdy and the bagpipe, to the abbé's sensitive ears, seemed to be playing a farewell song, a song growing more and more distant, and finally ceasing altogether. He was both happy and sad.

At the end of the dinner the heavy dishes of venison with which the table was spread disappeared in the twinkling of an eye, and were immediately replaced with cakes and fruit. Petit-Pinson brought in the baskets, and distributed the contents according to his own pleasure. He, too, was going

to be married two weeks later. He stepped proudly, and opened his eyes wider than ever. La Bruère reserved for herself alone the privilege of serving the young master and mistress, and with her old, wrinkled, trembling hands placed the finest fruits of the orchard before them,—transparent grapes, crimson apples, yellow pears, almonds in their green shells, hazel-nuts in their prickly coverings. They were so many fantastic emblems of congratulation for Denise and the abbé, who were unable to touch them.

When dessert was brought on the hall was more tumultuous than ever, and they drank the health of the newly married couple. "To the bridal pair and the abbé!" exclaimed Beauvais in a stentorian voice; and all the guests rose, and approached the new couple,

forming above the abbé's head a sort of chandelier of glasses, with a thousand facets and a thousand crystalline jinglings. The poor abbé, with his one hand, was very much embarrassed. Silence having been restored with considerable difficulty, three young girls, carrying bouquets of flowers, came and placed them in front of Denise, and standing with downcast eyes, they sang the following couplet to a slow air:

“Madam, from this bouquet
Which I hold in my hand
Take one flower bright and gay,
That thou may'st understand
How all these honors of a day
Like flowers will pass away.”*

It was a bridal song, the young girls' farewell to the new wife, — a song full of grave lessons, a sad, serious note in

the midst of the overflowing love of the first day. . . .

Denise listened with a smile, and thought to herself that love would not pass away like the flowers.

After the dinner there was a ball. Two violins and an oboe had taken the place of the hurdy-gurdy player and the bagpiper, who were quite out of breath. All the young people followed the new music, in a crowd, to the garden, where colored lamps were arranged to light a terrace given up to the dancers. The bridal pair were surrounded, and the ball began. Although it was October, it was one of those warm nights such as often occur in Touraine, where the autumn is so beautiful.

The gayety, transferred to a different environment, seemed to have taken a fresh start.

The abbé walked about among the dancers for a long time, looked several times into the hall where the older people remained with Beauvais, then went alone through the dark paths in the garden. A solemn joy followed him everywhere. He finally kissed Daniel and Denise, and went up into his tower. When he reached his room he opened the window, and sat down by it.

Around him extended the dark country and the starry heavens. At his feet, surrounded by a border of trees, the ball was going on, and sent up to him bursts of music and gayety. He forgot to watch the dancers, taking their partners, leaving them, intermingling and separating again. He followed every motion made by Denise and Daniel. About midnight a white form and a black one left the dance

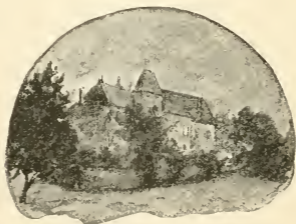
together, and disappeared. Gradually the music ceased, and the dancers went away in their turn. The lamps were extinguished, the garden became dark and still; but toward Pressigny, the sighing of the oboe could be heard, accompanied by the scraping of the violins, while the hurdy-gurdy and the bagpipe resounded from the direction of Étableaux. Singing and merry shouts were heard growing fainter and more distant. Here and there in the valleys lights appeared. They were lights from the windows in the houses to which some of the guests had just returned.

The abbé soon found himself, as it were, wrapped in silence. On the front of Les Templiers a single window was still lighted up, the one in the bridal chamber. The abbé looked at the

white lamp-light, then lifting his head toward the deep heavens, where the twinkling stars seemed to thrill with delight, he thought of the Denise of other days, the Denise so well beloved, who now dwelt above. His heart was full of joy, full of tenderness and sadness. He murmured half aloud this fragment from Simeon's song: —

“Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace. . . .”

And the tears flowed freely and gently down his emaciated cheeks.



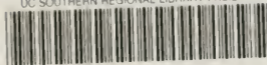
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